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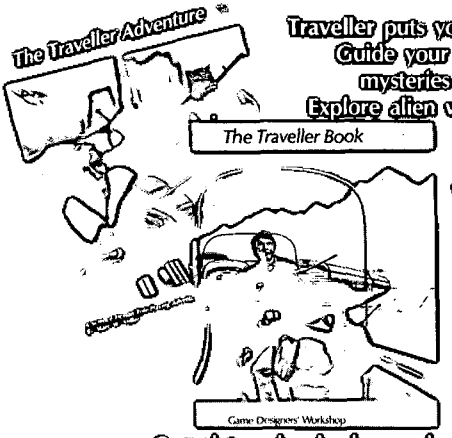

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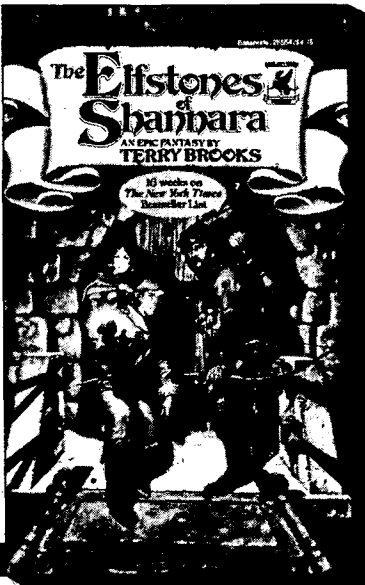

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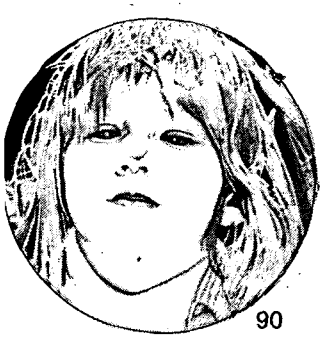

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Shawna McCarthy: Editor

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UP FRONT

by Shawna McCarthy

It's been a while, I know, since I last took any space in the magazine to talk with you, but I thought that since this issue represents my first anniversary as editor, I'd take a little time and space to bring you up to date on what's been happening in the past year.

First of all, it's been a wonderful year. Two stories from our pages won Nebula awards, and one (Fire Watch by Connie Willis) has also won a Hugo.

Secondly, the "new" *IAsfm* seems to be reaching favor in your eyes. Our subscriptions are up 25 percent from last year, and that can't help but warm the cockles of my heart. Thanks, all.

And finally, you've all noticed the changes that have crept into (and out of) our pages over the last year. Let me bring you up to date on them. The crossword puzzle, while an entertaining and well-constructed puzzle for those of you who like puzzles, is going to be cut back to four a year. It seems that not *enough* of you liked puzzles. So be it. "Viewpoint," although it's been appearing and disappearing lately, will remain. However, it and other "features" will always be the first to be cut in case of space problems—if advertising threatens to squeeze out any part of the magazine, I promise you it won't be fiction.

And now, ladies and gentlemen, I'm certain you're all on the edge of your collective seats, waiting for the announcement of the Viewpoint Contest winner. So as not to keep you in suspense any longer, the winner is Meredith B. Olson of Seattle, Washington, for his "Behind the Chemical Closet Door." Mr. Olson will receive $50.00, an autographed copy of *Foundation's Edge,* and publication of his essay. You can read it for yourselves, starting on page 30.

Four essays, in fact, made it to the finish line, and it was only by consulting Isaac for the tie-breaking vote that we came up with a winner. The three runners up, in alphabetical order were: Ruth O. Beach of Denver, Colorado; E. Douglas Cline of Newkirk, Oklahoma; and Judith Wright of Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Thanks again for letting me hear from you and for helping me to constantly improve the quality of *IAsfm.* ●

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EDITORIAL

PSEUDONYMS

by Isaac Asimov

It was quite fashionable, in earlier times, to refrain from putting one's name to things one had written. The writer could leave himself unnamed ("anonymous"—from Greek words meaning "no name"), or else he could use a false name ("pseudonym"—from Greek words meaning "false name"). So common was the practice that a pseudonym is often referred to as a "pen-name," or, to give it greater elegance by placing it in French, a "nom de plume."

There were a variety of reasons for this. In most places in the world and at most times, it was all too easy to write something that would get you in trouble. The corruption, venality, and cruelty of those in power cried out for exposure, and those in power had the strongest objections to being exposed. For that reason, writers had to expect all sorts of governmental correction if caught—anywhere from a fine to death by torture.

The best-known example of this type of pseudonym was Voltaire, the 18th century French satirist, whose real name was Francois-Marie Arouet.

A second major reason was that any nonscholarly writing was looked upon as rather frivolous, and a decent person guilty of concocting such material might well be looked upon askance by society, and considered as having lost caste. A pseudonym, therefore, preserved respectability. This was especially true of women who were widely considered subhuman in mentality (by men) and who would have shocked the world by a too-open demonstration of the possession of brains. Mary Ann Evans, therefore, wrote under the name of George Eliot, and Charlotte Bronte at first wrote under the name of Currer Bell.

One would think that neither reason would hold for the world of modern American science fiction. Why should anyone fear punishment for writing science fiction in our free land, or why should anyone fear the loss of respectability if convicted of the deed. And yet—

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It is conceivable, particularly in the early days of magazine science fiction, that people in the more sensitive professions, such as teaching, would not have cared to have it known that they wrote "pseudo-scientific trash" and so would protect themselves from lack-of-promotion, or outright dismissal, by the use of a pseudonym. I don't know of such cases definitely, but I suspect some.

It is even more likely that in the bad old days before the women's movement became strong, women who wrote science fiction concealed their sex from the readers (and even, sometimes, from the editors). Science fiction was thought to be a very masculine pursuit at the time and I know two editors (no names, please, even though both are now dead) who insisted on believing that women *could not* write good science fiction. Pseudonyms were therefore necessary if they were to sell anything at all.

Sometimes, women did not have to use pseudonyms. Their first names might be epicene, and that would be protection enough. Thus, Leslie F. Stone and Leigh Brackett were women but, as far as one could tell from their names, they might be as masculine as Leslie Fiedler and Leigh Hunt. Editors and readers at first believed they were.

Or women might simply convert names to initials. Could you tell that A. R. Long owned up to the name of Amelia, or that C. L. Moore was Catherine to her friends?

There were other reasons for pseudonyms in science fiction. In the early days of the magazine many of the successful writers could only make a living by writing a great deal just as fast as they could, for a variety of pulp markets. They might use different names for different markets, creating separate personalities, so to speak, that wouldn't compete with each other. Thus Will Jenkins wrote for the slicks under his own name, but adopted the pseudonym Murray Leinster when he wrote science fiction.

Sometimes, even within the single field of science fiction, particular writers wrote too many stories. They were so good that editors would cheerfully buy, let us say, eighteen stories from them in a particular year in which they only published twelve issues of their magazines. This meant (if you work out the arithmetic carefully) that it would be necessary to run more than one story by them in a single issue now and then, and editors generally have a prejudice against that. Readers would feel they were cheated of variety, or suspect that editors were showing undue favoritism, or who knows what. Therefore some of the sto-

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ries would be put under a pseudonym.

The pseudonyms might be transparent enough. For instance, Robert A. Heinlein at the height of his magazine popularity wrote half his stories under the name of Anson MacDonald, but Bob's middle initial A. stood for Anson, and MacDonald was the maiden name of his then-wife. Similarly, L. Ron Hubbard wrote under the name of Rene Lafayette, but the initial L. in Hubbard's name was Lafayette, and Rene was a not-too-distant version of Ron. Still, as long as the readers were led to believe that not too many stories of one author were included in the inventory, all was well.

Sometimes, an author is so identified with a particular type of story, that when he writes another type of story, he doesn't want to confuse the reader by false associations—so he adopts a new name. Thus, John W. Campbell was a writer of superscience stories of cosmic scope, and one day he wrote a story called *Twilight* which was altogether different. He put it under the name of Don A. Stuart (his then-wife's maiden name was Dona Stuart, you see) and rapidly made that name even more popular than his own.

Sometimes, an author simply wants to separate his writing activities from his nonwriting activities, if they are of equal importance to him. Thus, a talented teacher at Milton Academy, who is named Harry C. Stubbs, writes under the name of Hal Clement. He's not hiding. Hal is short for Harry, as all Shakespearian devotees know, and the C. in his full name stands for Clement.

Again, my dear wife has practiced medicine for over thirty years as Janet Jeppson, M.D. As a writer she prefers J. O. Jeppson. The earnings fall into two different slots as far as the I.R.S. is concerned and that makes it convenient for her bookkeeping.

In my own case, I have eschewed pseudonyms almost entirely; I am far too fond of my own name, and far too proud of my writing to want to sail under false colors for *any* reason. And yet, in one or two cases—

Thus in 1951, I was persuaded to write a juvenile science fiction novel in the hope that it would be sold as the beginning of a long-lived television series. (Those were early days, and no one understood how television was going to work.) I objected, very correctly I think, that TV might ruin the stuff and make me ashamed of having my name associated with it. My editor said, "Then use a pseudonym."

I did, plucking Paul French out of the air for the purpose, and eventually wrote six novels under that name. (Some people,

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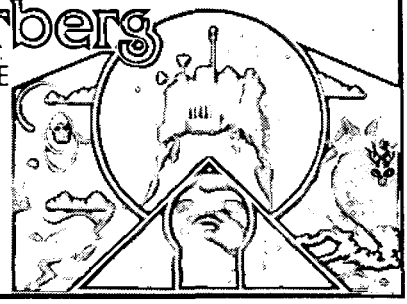

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with little knowledge of science fiction, assumed from this that *all* my SF was written under Paul French, a suggestion that simply horrified me.)

As soon as it was clear that TV was not interested in my juveniles, I dropped all pretense, and made use of the Three Laws of Robotics, for instance, which was a dead give-away. Eventually, when it was time for new printings, I had my own name put upon it.

Again, in 1942, I wrote a short story for an editor who wanted it done under a pseudonym in order to give the impression that it was by a brand-new author. (The reason is complicated and I won't bore you with it. You'll find it in my autobiography.) I wrote it, reluctantly, under the name George E. Dale, but eventually included it in my book *The Early Asimov* as a story of my own.

Also, in 1942, I sold a story to the magazine *Super Science Stories* which printed it under the pseudonym H. B. Ogden, for reasons I no longer remember. (Even *my* memory has its limits.) So little did I care for the story, and so unhappy was I over the nonuse of my name that I totally forgot about it, until nearly forty years later when I was going over my diary carefully in order to prepare my autobiography.

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I was shocked to find there was a story of mine that I had forgotten and didn't own in printed form. Fortunately, with the help of Forrest J. Ackerman I got the issue and reprinted the story in the first volume of my autobiography, *In Memory Yet Green*, acknowledging it as my own.

In 1971, I was persuaded to write a book entitled *The Sensuous Dirty Old Man*, in which I gently satirized sexual how-to books such as *The Sensuous Woman*. Since the latter book was written by a writer identified only as "J," my editor felt the joke should be carried on by having my book written by "Dr. A." Even before publication day, however, it was announced that I was the author and my identity was never a secret.

At the present moment, then, absolutely none of my writing appears under anything but my own name.

Which brings up one puzzle. The early pulps occasionally made use of "house names." A particular magazine would use a pseudonym that was never used except in that magazine, but that pseudonym might be used by any number of *different* writers. I have never really understood why this was done and if any reader knows I would appreciate being told. ●

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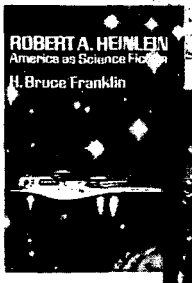

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LETTERS

Dear Shawna McCarthy,

First of all, I'd like you to know that I enjoy reading your magazine and always find it helpful in spotting new talent and in keeping track of who is doing what. Consequently, I feel you will be interested to know that our department will be concentrating on doing more science fiction and fantasy for young readers in the future. Your magazine could help us get this information to interested authors so we hope you will be willing to run the following announcement.

Harper & Row Junior Books Group is committed to publishing quality fantasy and science fiction for middle-grade readers and for young adults. We will be publishing our novels in two age categories aimed at 8–11 and 11–14 year olds. We will be happy to consider manuscripts whose complexity of plot, characterization and emotions are appropriate for either age level. All queries and submissions should be sent to me at the address below.

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Sincerely,

Antonia Markiet
Associate Editor
Harper & Row Junior Books Group
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Gentlepeople,

As a busy college student I barely have time enough for my studies, let alone reading fiction for pleasure. Yet somehow I always find the time to read *IAsfm* from cover to cover. I must say that you people are doing a fine job!

There are a few comments I would like to make. I enjoyed the June 1983 issue. On the whole it was good. But why do you put so many stories written in the first person in it? Is that a preference by the editors? Or did it just work out that way?

I have also noted a trend in the last dozen issues or so. Maybe I'm wrong (and I hope I am) but it seams that the number of new authors appearing on the pages of *IAsfm* is lessening. Oh, I love stories by Pohl, Longyear, Niven, and Silverberg, but one of the charms of your magazine (at least to me) is coming across interesting yarns by authors who have not been published many times before. Perhaps your editorial standards are a "wee bit" high? The stories by the masters, such as above, are hard acts to follow. I for one would like very much to see some more "rough gems."

All in all I really have no complaints about the magazine. Keep

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up the good work! It is obvious that you people care about every issue you produce.

James A. Paatalo
1464 Schletti St.
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One of the old-timers you mention, Longyear, was discovered by us as a new author; one of quite a number. I assure you that there is no such thing as editorial standards being too high. Even if we didn't have our self-respect, no magazine could survive if it didn't publish the very best stories it could find.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov

I am only 15 years old, and not very active. Because of which I do a considerable amount of reading. Since I am considered to have a very large vocabulary, I find it quite disturbing when reading a science fiction or fantasy book, and find an abundance of words I do not understand. Even though some of these are in the dictionary, a lot of them are made up by the authors to be alien languages, etc.

I would find it quite useful if the next time a group of you science fiction and fantasy authors get together, you would look over each others' books (not all of them of course), and pick out words you feel the average science fiction reader would not have any idea about. Then ask each other for the definition, and publish them in a sort of science fiction dictionary.

I know how you feel about doing "small things" for people, so if you feel it would not be worth your time, please forget about it.

Sincerely yours,

Daniel White
Paradise Valley, AZ

This has sometimes been suggested, but I don't think it will really work. Different writers make up their own words, and sometimes one will use the same word another uses, but in a different way. The only sure way out is to read carefully and you will pick up the meaning from the story.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Doctor:

I have been a fan of your magazine since its birth. I have watched it grow from infancy to become the leading science fiction magazine anywhere.

Since I have kept such a close watch over the years, I feel like a part of the family, and as a member of the family I feel that I can make a comment or two. First, I love the magazine and I wish you continued success. Second, and here's my only complaint. It's "Mooney's Module." I pride myself with having a fairly good sense of humor but I'm afraid that I don't find many of these cartoons very funny. What has been the general response to these satirical comics?

That is my one and only complaint, if you can call it one. Thanks for a great magazine.

Michael Boyd
Halifax, NS
Canada.

"Mooney's Module" is an original concept and the satire it represents is usually very understated, and not

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always obvious. Give it some thought—and some time.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Shawna or Ike, or whoever,

I'm writing mainly to back up Asimov on the question of *Star Trek* attracting women readers to science fiction. However frivolously expressed, it's true. Proofs: (A) James Blish announced publicly that sales of his science fiction books increased enormously after he began writing *Star Trek* books. (B) Science fiction fandom went from about 10% female to about 40% female shortly after *Star Trek* went on the air. (And several of our new friends about that time were former Trekkies; that's too small a sample to mean much, except for the emphasis on *former* Trek people. Several people of my acquaintance learned about science fiction directly from *Star Trek* fandom, and promptly dropped ST and became science fiction fans.) (C) Authors Jacqueline Lichtenberg and Jean Lorrah came directly out of *Star Trek* fandom; they wrote for ST fanzines before becoming professional authors, and they did *not* write for science fiction fanzines.

Of course some women came into science fiction strictly from discovering science fiction books; my wife is one of them. Bjo Trimble, who became the guru of *Star Trek* fandom, was a science fiction fan long before *Star Trek* went on the air. But a vast number of female science fiction readers did indeed "graduate" from the TV show. (And, of course, an even larger number remained in media fandom; nobody is claiming that all ST fans became science fiction readers.)

Norman Spinrad says that before *The Book of the New Sun*, Gene Wolfe labored "in relative obscurity." That relative obscurity included 6 appearances on the final Nebula ballot (and one win) and 3 appearances on the final Hugo ballot; since both are popularity contests, I submit that he wasn't all that damned obscure. (And, lest Spinrad explode over my calling the Nebulas a popularity contest —I've been a SFWA officer too, Norman, and I know just how much critical judgment is involved in it.)

Robert Coulson
Hartford City, IN

There's no question that the visual media can be powerful. As I write, two spin-off novels based on The Return of the Jedi *are at the top of the hard-cover and soft-cover best-seller lists.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Friends,

I will try not to take up too much room with a long letter, but I would like to cover a lot.

First, I thank everyone who made it possible for your magazine to be in Braille. Next, your question some issues ago about "what we like and dislike." I think some sex and a little violence would be fine, because these two elements are natural in life. They also develop characters, and make the story more realistic.

To whoever selects stories; I really like far-reaching ones like Somtow Sucharitkul's Inquestors and Mallworld, Greg Bear's "Hardfought,"

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and others like "The Eternity Wave," and Daniel Keys Moran's "Grey Maelstrom," and his first one (I forgot the title).

I have only one complaint. With all these wonderful far-reaching, monumental stories, why do you no longer published Avram Davidson's work, and yet continue with Janet Jeppson's "stuff." His is fantastic, hers is in a rut, a psychoanalytic rut, with cutesy (and now boring) Freudian food puns, etc. Really, Ms. Jeppson, would Isaac have gotten where he is today if he relied on Black Widowers Tales? Of course not.

Thank you once again for a fine magazine,

Ron Oberlin
Atlanta, GA

I assure you that Janet writes other things as well. Walker And Company has published a science fiction novel of hers, intended for young readers, that is entitled Norby, the Mixed-Up Robot. *It is the first of a series. And, as it happens, Doubleday is publishing a collection of her Pshrinks Anonymous stories, entitled* The Mysterious Cure and Other Stories.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I have been meaning to write you for some time. I came across a few issues of your magazine about a year and a half ago in a garage sale, and promptly snatched them up. Among them was the April 1980 issue in which Jo Clayton's "Southwind My Mother" appeared. This story is magnificent! Shortly after reading it, I decided I would subscribe to your magazine, and did so.

But I have seen no more of her stories! Are any coming?

Please also, tell me, is it possible to get a copy of the February and June 1979 issues in which Ms. Clayton's work also appeared? If this is not possible, is it possible to at least purchase photocopies of her two stories from these issues? Her work is outstanding!

Also, I have been looking in the bookstores ever since I read her story, hoping to catch her name on a book, but I haven't yet. Has she written anything that is available? Collections of short stories, a novel? Her writing is so refreshingly free, and lyrical, like a breath of fresh sea breeze—As you can tell, I have become a "fan" of her work after one story and despite many months passing.

Thank you, Dr. Asimov,
Sincerely,

Carol C. Horn
Mountain View, CA

Sometimes a sterling writer of short stories seems to stop writing when that is not really so. It may just mean (as in Ms. Clayton's case) that she is concentrating on novels. She has done several books with DAW.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

I know this is late, but you asked so I'm answering. I must vote "no" on "More Asimov?". The reasons you stated would match mine, although I would not think you would be using "your" magazine to publish and/or promote your writings.

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I agree your appearances would mean the non-appearances of other, perhaps beginning, writers. *Asimov's*, to my understanding, was set up to encourage and promote unpublished and/or unknown authors. I'd like it to stay that way. (Some of my most enjoyed stories are from new writers.) And, as you point out, you are not without work. And work that you enjoy. Someone else may be.

However, I do not advocate "no Asimov" either. I think the amount that has been should remain. Let those who want more of your work go out and buy it the way those who enjoy other authors have to do.

Know that I speak only of your *stories*. If your *editorials* were to be left out for even one month, I would grieve much and consider any issues, though they were filled with stories from the best writers of SF, quite inferior.

Barbara Barbre

You needn't worry. My editorials will not be left out, although on occasion, Shawna may (very properly) object to an editorial for one or another valid reason—and then I just write another.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Sir:

In your July issue there was a letter from one F.A. Barnes which objected to all non-science fiction in your magazine, and in particular to the recently added column on role-playing games. Although I realize that such complaints are frequent and are generally inconsequential, I would like to answer this one in particular because *Isaac Asimov's* is the only science fiction magazine I read which covers such games, and I wish that all of them did. There is a growing undercurrent of what are often called "gamers" and many, dare I say most, of them are also interested in science fiction and fantasy, etc. By including even so small a column as you do, you have undoubtedly reached many of your readers.

To (Mr? Mrs.? Ms.?) Barnes and others who protest the inclusion of such features I can offer no comfort. I myself do not read, either, all the features or all the stories in each magazine, and I, too, have noticed the various changes in the magazine, but I do get enough out of each to justify continuing to read them. Simply remember, please, that *Isaac Asimov's* has thousands of readers and that not all of them are like yourself.

Besides, about a third of the pages between the cover and the first story are covered with advertising. Were the lengthy novellas often published in the magazine placed in the front, they would be chopped up so as to make reading them rather an annoying task.

Well, Dr. Asimov, may I have your job answering letters?
Sincerely,

Matthew Posner
North Miami Beach, FL

You make very good points, Mr. Posner, but if you were to take my job answering letters, I would be fired on the very good grounds that I have to do something *to justify my hanging around the office and making eyes at Shawna.*

—Isaac Asimov

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Dear Dr. Asimov,

I have just read the letter from Sandra Dutkey in your July 1983 issue of *IAsfm*.

I personally don't think she should be so upset over your statement of women coming to science fiction because of Spock's ears. Sure, there are a lot of us who fell in love with science fiction by reading it, but probably more "came over" because of Spock's ears or some movie. It happens all the time.

An example, which I cite only because I saw it with my own eyes, is Burt Reynolds. Most of my peers, at that time, "discovered" Mr. Reynolds only after his centerfold in *Cosmopolitan*. I had been madly in love with him (though I was only a child) since he played the half-breed blacksmith in *Gunsmoke*, but that didn't make me any more of a fan than they were.

I myself discovered science fiction on the way to school in the sixth grade (twenty years ago). There, in the gutter, was a copy of Theodore Sturgeon's *The Synthetic Man*. Soon, I was reading anything I could find by Sturgeon, Asimov, Bradbury, Clarke, Herbert—the list keeps growing—Ellison, Zelazny, Norton, Le Guin, Lee. There are others—it's just that I know anything written by these people is going to be worth reading.

I don't see the reason to get upset. No matter how you discover science fiction, whether it's by finding a book—in the street or in the library—being attracted to Mr. Spock's ears, or by one of the great (or even "B") movies, at least you did discover it and it's fantastic.

Gayle Dickerson
Kerrville, TX

Just the same, being introduced to science fiction by way of the gutter is a rather odd thought. And certainly Ted's books don't belong there. I wonder what idiot threw it there.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Shawna:

I don't write often to magazines. I feel it is their job to entertain me, not vice versa. But the July '83 issue made me take note.

Why do you almost always have one of the worst stories illustrated on the cover? By comparison, *Analog* (dare I say the name?) usually has the *best* story illustrated. I don't want to slight you, but is your *Analog* counterpart so much better at his job? As editor, don't you have control over the cover art? Or do you feel that a *fantasy* story, good or bad, should get the cover? Or do you feel it will help circulation to cover a "name" author?

IAsfm bills itself as "science fiction" . . . so why hype the fantasy? Especially a story as bad as "La Reine Blanche." As the Asians say, "Number ten," that is, the *pits*. Which brings me, in a circuitous fashion, to the point.

Thomas Wylde's *The Nanny* was great!!! It was *science fiction*. I became totally involved in the story, as a reader always is with good writing. Good characters, good plot, excellent style, superb premise . . . and not even *mentioned* on the cover, let alone *illustrated*. Didn't his story meet "editorial requirements" for the cover, or some other excuse? Does one have to be an "instant sale" writer to receive credit for being most excellent?

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I don't mean to be insulting, but I do mean to be very critical. *IAsfm* has the potential to be *the* science fiction magazine of the world. I like the new format, but the story selections are still far behind other magazines. And I'm not talking about new writers—some of the established authors have been in your pages with truly poor showings. As my school teachers used to say, "Live up to your potentials." Read just one more submission, answer another query, be *hard* on your writers. And make your publication number one.

Sincerest regards,

Sid Phillips
P.O. Box 331
Hogansville, GA 30230

Tastes differ, of course. No matter which story we put on the cover, some will think it a poor one and bemoan the better one that wasn't mentioned. And, incidentally, a fact of life— When possible, we put a well-known name on the cover. It helps circulation and it is as important to do that to a magazine as to a human being.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Ms. McCarthy
and Dr. Asimov,

My joy in the July issue started with the cover and swiftly flowed into the editorial. I agree! Let's declare the '80s "Global Awareness Decade."

"Le Reine Blanche" was an excellent beginning for the fiction —"The Artist of Hunger" paled a little in comparison, but was still readable. "Ascent of the North Face" was delightful and "Out of the Womb" created a nice mythology. "The Eye of the Beholder" was perhaps a bit too long for its subject, but it didn't suffer too much. And "Space Opera for (Purists) (Modernists)" was hilarious. I'm sure I (giggled) (snickered) everytime I came to a parenthesis—and sometimes in between. I hope my first sale is as entertaining. "Petrified" was good. "The Nanny" was *great.*

I love your SF poetry. Please print more. "The Space Song of J.A. Prufrock III" was particularly good and "Veronica" was a wonderful, non-human love poem.

Norman Spinrad did a nice job for "On Books," Martin Gardner's "Viewpoint" was interesting, and the letters—"But wait," you say, "isn't there anything you didn't like?"

Not really. I did like some things better than others, but, as issues go, this is one of your best. Keep up the good work.

Laurel Winter
3203C 15th Ave. NW
Rochester, MN 55901

Every once in a while, we are criticized for printing letters of undiluted praise. Well, we get a number of them and it would be dishonest not to print one now and then. Thank you, Ms. Winter.

—Isaac Asimov

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IAsfm Puzzle #18 by Merl H. Reag

SIGHT GAG

ACROSS

1 Start of an SF straight line
7 USSR, in the USSR
11 Assam silkworm
14 Fredric Brown's "Martians ——"
15 Girlfriend of 2 Down, in the comics
16 Artist Richard Corben epic
17 Tarzan, e.g.
18 Iconoclastic
20 More of straight line
22 Winter warm-up
25 Example
26 African lily
27 Eando Binder's "—— Link—Robot"
28 Like "The Thing," 1982
29 Evening, to Eisenstadt
30 Favorite
31 Marine marker
32 Algis Budrys's "—— Night"
33 End of straight line
35 Sci-fi croaker of 1972
37 Peter ——, author of "Moon On An Iron Meadow"
38 Vacation spot
41 Writer Schulberg and director Boetticher
42 ERB's "The —— Girl"
43 Eerie 1958 chiller, "I —— The Living"
44 Arrow poison
45 Dorothy's dog
46 First name of 38 Down's author
47 Start of the punchline
50 Handel piece
51 —— valve (heart part)
55 WesterCon attendee, e.g.
56 Word with Central or State
57 Blazing
58 Take wing
59 Units of work
60 End of the punchline

DOWN

1 U.S. film directors' org.
2 Famous Alley
3 Renowned rebel
4 It takes a beating
5 Montgomery Clift's birthplace
6 Fantasy director Clair
7 Source of Western music?
8 Express
9 Stakes a ——
10 Artoo and Threepio, e.g.
11 Grub
12 Film's opening?
13 "You don't say!"
19 Apt
21 Binary 25
22 Pipsqueak explosive
23 Henry Purcell work
24 Creature popular in calendardom
28 Phasers
29 Swiss river
31 Traveler's load
32 Celebration
33 Henry's wheels
34 Actress June
35 Michael Bishop's "A —— For The Eyes of Fire"
36 Samuel ——

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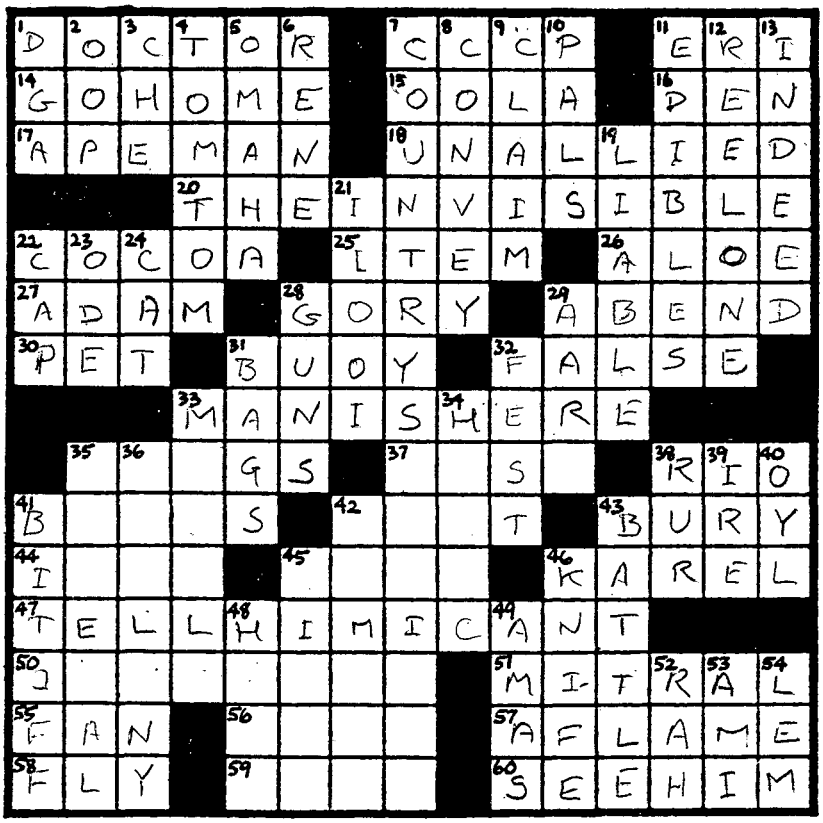
Solution on page 71

38 Play in which "robot" first appears
39 Dander
40 Olive shaped like a beanpole?
41 —— more than one could chew
42 Kenneth Bulmer's "The Earth Gods Are ——"
43 1980 sci-fier "—— Beyond The Stars"
45 Utter bore
46 Polanski's "—— in the Water"
48 "Road picture" regular
49 Part of "to love," in Latin
52 Stadium call
53 "—— dreaming?"
54 Moon scooter



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GAMING by Dana Lombardy

Pentantastar by Adventure Games Inc. (1278 Selby Ave., St. Paul, MN 55104) is a new fantasy game that really shows how a fantasy design differs from a SF design. That's because in *Pentantastar* you can win either by military or by magical means.

Some fantasy games merely use magic as a type of weapon in the combat-phase of a turn. This "magic," plus pieces representing trolls, dragons, elves, etc., are what classify such games as "fantasy." Unless the fantasy creatures have special powers or different capabilities, they might as well be called crossbowmen, archers, and knights. Such is not the case in *Pentantastar,* which offers a rich variety fantasy.

There are two separate games going on at the same time in *Pentantastar.* A military conflict is in progress, between Arkhon, Lord of the West, and Farin, King of Vanzar in the East. Arkhon, from his fortress of Lug Balor near the Terken Wastes, directs his army of trolls, dragons, and soldiers against Farin's dwarves, elves, eagles, and soldiers. While this conflict rages, with neither side gaining the upper hand, Arkhon unleashes a deadly tide of millions of Vorts—blind, poisonous snakes which threaten to destroy the East.

Now the second game—the game of magic and wizards—makes its importance felt. While the armies struggle to find a military solution, each side simultaneously competes on a magical level. Arkhon's wolf and Farin's wizards, Waalibor and Seraphael, search for the five charms that make up the Pentantastar. When complete, the Pentantastar is a powerful weapon that can destroy either side when carried to their center of power, their key city. One of the charms by itself eliminates all the vorts.

The quest of the wizards and the wolf is as crucial in the game as the battles of the armies. It's possible to win either purely by military means or by magical powers.

The game comes with a full-color map, hand painted in nice detail, with areas cleverly indicated by subtle lines. Instead

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"MIND-CROGGLING"... Harlan Ellison

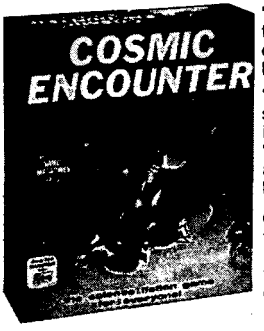
Best SF Game
Games Day, London 1982

Best SF Game
Space Gamer Mag 1980, 1981

2nd Best Family Game
Games Day, London 1981

Ten Best Games Hon. Men.
Omni Mag 1980

Games 100 Best Games
Games Mag. 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983



"Cosmic Encounter is a teeth-gritting mind-croggling exercise in What-If"... **Harlan Ellison**

"So much fun you forget how strategic a game it really is"...Games Mag.

"SF Involvement...fast (paced) and tense..." **Isaac Asimov's** Mag.

COSMIC ENCOUNTER, by the creators of **Frank Herbert's** DUNE game and the DARKOVER game based on **Marion Zimmer Bradley's** novels.

Ask for Cosmic Encounter at your local hobby or game store or order directly from **Eon Products,** Box AA RFD 2, Sheldon Rd., Barre, MA 01005
Price $20/2-4 players/age 12 and up/average playing time 45 min.
Money-Back Guarantee from Eon Products if you don't like Cosmic Encounter!

of hexes or squares, the map uses these areas for placement and movement of the pieces. The effect makes it look less like a game surface and more like a map you'd see in a fantasy book.

The map features forests, deserts, plains, mountains, volcanoes, oceans, lakes, villages, and walled cities. Even an ice glacier is represented. The scroll border around the edge of the map contains the key as to what each feature on the map represents.

There are 173 large, 5/8-inch, die-cut counters, that are your playing pieces. There are also five "charms" (different colored discs) to be placed on the board in various locations that represent the parts of the Pentantastar; 72 playing cards used for mobilization of the armies, and to determine random events such as storms, traitors, etc.; a sheet outlining play procedure for both the magical and military turns on one side, with tables and charts for moving and fighting on the opposite side; a 10-page booklet with the story of the Pentantastar; and a 10-page illustrated booklet of rules.

Either two or four players can play the game. With two players, one will be Arkhon, and move his wolf on its quest, as well as his military forces. The other player is Farin, who searches for the missing parts

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of the Pentantastar with his wizards, while maneuvering his military forces against the West. The four-player game has a team of two players per side, with one player concerned with the military aspects of the game, and the other with the magic and quest for the parts of the Pentantastar.

Military victory is achieved by occupying enemy cities and territory. A magical victory is achieved by gathering the five pieces of the Pentantastar and taking it to the opposing side's capital city.

Special Request: If you know about a braille version of *Dungeons & Dragons®*, or of any other role-playing games, please contact: Mrs. Donna Kay Ring, 269 Terhune Ave., Passaic, NJ 07055. If your group is in the Passaic area and you can use an experienced, blind player, please contact Mrs. Ring. O

ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

CONGRATULATES THE WINNERS OF THE 1982 HUGO AWARDS

Best Novel
Foundation's Edge
Isaac Asimov

Best Novella
"Souls"
Joanna Russ
(*F&SF*, Jan., 1982)

Best Novelette
"Fire Watch"
Connie Willis
(*Asimov's* Feb. 15, 1982)

Best Short Story
"Melancholy Elephants"
Spider Robinson
(*Analog*, Jun., 1982)

Best Professional Editor
Edward L. Ferman

Best Professional Artist
Michael Whelan

Best Nonfiction Book
Isaac Asimov: The Foundations of Science Fiction
James Gunn

Best Dramatic Presentation
Bladerunner

Best Fan Writer
Richard E. Geis

Best Fan Artist
Alexis Gilliland

Best Fanzine
Locus
Charles N. Brown

John W. Campbell Award
for Best New Writer
Paul O. Williams

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THE WHOLE PLANET WAS OUT TO STOP THEM—
THE WHOLE PLANET WAS GOING TO REGRET IT

THE
FORLORN HOPE

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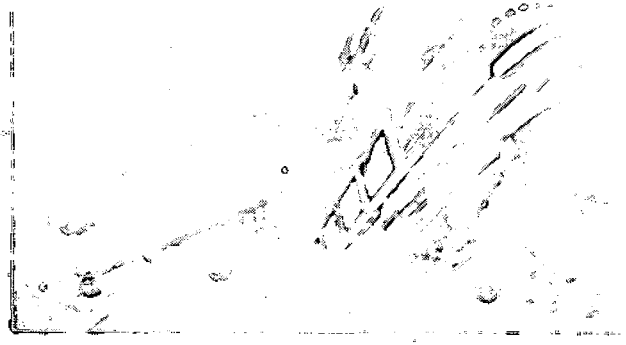

WITH ONLY THE GUNS IN THEIR HANDS, THIS TINY BAND, THIS "FORLORN HOPE" MUST BATTLE STAR SHIPS, ARTILLERY, TREACHERY—AND THE MOST POWERFUL TANKS IN THE UNIVERSE.

DAVID DRAKE

THE AUTHOR OF HAMMER'S SLAMMERS

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WE'RE PART OF THE FUTURE

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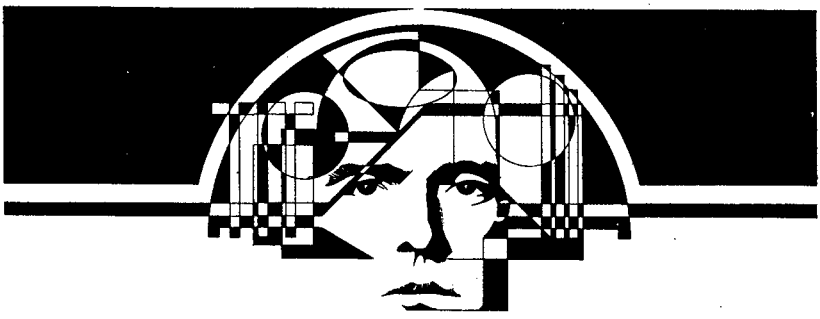
MARTIN GARDNER

RIDDLES OF THE SPHINXES



Dr. Mitsu Matsu, the world-renowned genetic engineer, was the first to construct two-dimensional life forms. Well, not exactly two dimensional, but almost. They are crystal-like microorganisms that flourish in monolayer cultures—liquids that form a film on smooth surfaces that is only one molecule thick.

Matsu called his organisms "rep-tiles" for two reasons: they replicate themselves, and they are shaped like polygonal tiles. All rep-tiles are much too small to be visible except in powerful neutrino microscopes. They slowly swim about through the monolayer liquid by means of tiny cilia on their border, and obtain food by absorbing it through their "skin." As a rep-tile grows, it preserves its polygonal shape. When it reaches a critical size, it splits not in half, like an amoeba, but into four identical smaller tiles, each precisely the same shape as the original. If the shape is asymmetric, in the sense of not being identical with its mirror image, the four newly "born" rep-tiles need not be of the same "handedness" as the original. That is, one or more of the four may be mirror images of the original.

At first, Matsu was able to create rep-tiles only in the shapes of triangles and squares. It is easy to see how an equilateral triangle can be divided into four smaller equilateral triangles, and how squares can be split into four smaller squares. Several months later he managed to produce three nonsquare rep-tiles,

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each with four sides, and three six-sided rep-tiles. They are shown in Figure 1.

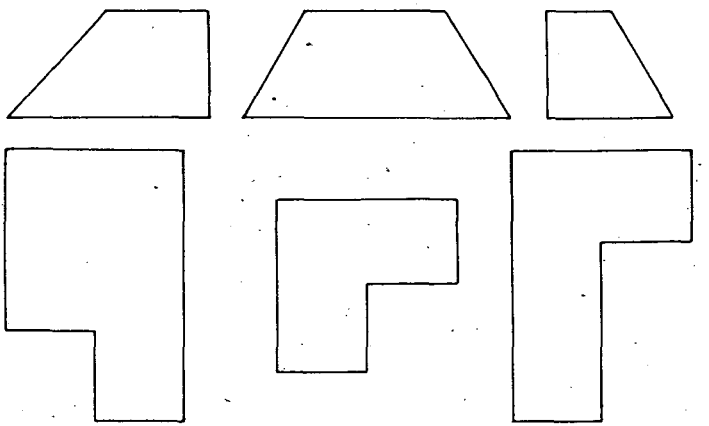

Figure 1

How quickly can you draw lines on each of these six shapes to show how they replicate by splitting into four identical parts, each the same shape as the original? The solutions are given on page 70.

A STILL FROM THE MEAD COLLECTION

Here Margaret has spread the Manus on a long table
All the shots of women, just women
Children rearing children on their backs
Pioneer years of anthropological photography
She records them in her notebook
Like a grandmother with ten thousand relations

This black & white distills a mirror's essence
A documentation of the science of documentation
A portrait along the eyeball's surface

—Robert Frazier

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VIEWPOINT CONTEST WINNER!

VIEWPOINT

BEHIND THE CHEMICAL-CLOSET DOOR

art: Odbert

We'd like to thank the Seattle, Washington students who encouraged Mr. Olson to submit this provocative Viewpoint.

by Meredith B. Olson

I teach mathematics and science to "gifted" middle school students. Today several students presented me with the June 1983 copy of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* and insisted that I enter the Viewpoint Contest.

Over the years I have done research on their learning styles and insightful behavior. I have also instigated sneaky science fiction reading. Many of the students with whom I have contact find themselves at odds with their language-arts teachers. They want to read, but not for the purpose of pleasing a teacher. They have consistently expressed interest in science fiction, but not the type of science fiction

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VIEWPOINT

assigned in their language-arts classes.

On several occasions I took former students of mine to a book warehouse and instructed them to collect "worthwhile" books. These I purchased and placed in pockets on the inside of my chemical-closet door. Secretly, students would request the loan of a book. Upon return, they would select another, and another. Presently my supply would become exhausted and I would find it necessary to forage again in the book warehouse. I had become an underground supplyhouse for interesting reading. This was never mentioned to other teachers, and only those students interested in the physics aspects of science fiction maintained participation over extended time periods.

Who reads science fiction and why do they read it? Do different sorts of people read different sorts of stories? Is science fiction a single category?

Many people are quite specific about the type of science fiction they prefer. Psychological fantasy does not "turn them on." This group of people has a running battle with high school teachers who assign fantasy science fiction for them to read and then demand exhaustive psychological and sociological analyses of the story. These people are addicted to a type of science fiction which might be called "physics" fiction.

Are the brains of "fantasy" fiction and "physics" fiction readers different? Do people who display these different preferences differ in intellectual abilities, talents, and deficiencies? A scientific answer to these questions could affect the way stories are written and the way schoolwork is assigned. The idea that people can be "pigeon-holed" so easily may, variously, shock, intrigue, delight, depress, and reassure the publishing community.

Generations of writers have lavished attention on the story lines in science fiction. Are the story lines enough? Most, if not all, science fiction readers enjoy following them. But "physics" fiction readers also relish the physics and

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mathematics involved in the development of the plot. They are interested in thoughtful consideration of "impossible" physics. This type of individual finds that science fiction provides a "safe" way to try out extravagant scientific ideas and fully explore consequences. The realities of the known physical world do not limit their reasoning about these alternative settings. In school these individuals typically are superior mathematics and physical science students. If mathematical ability is, to some extent, inborn (at least the "spatial" component), then is a preference for "physics" fiction innate?

Does brain structure determine behavior, or is the reverse true? Can intensive reading of "fantasy" fiction or "physics" fiction alter the way brain cells make connections? Or is it, perhaps, that brains which possess connections allowing for excellence in higher mathematics and physics are better attuned to the reading of "physics" fiction?

Recent research done at Harvard Medical School (Waber) indicates that children who reach puberty earlier than normal have brains that are less specialized in terms of the functioning of the two hemispheres. The left and right hemispheres seem to share more tasks. These people are described as being more socially intuitive. When people say that "fantasy" fiction "turns them on," do they really mean that both sides of their brains are getting stimulation?

Individuals who reach puberty relatively later than some idealized average person may have had more time for their brains to specialize. On the other hand, later puberty may simply indicate a slower and less intimately connected lateralization. Perhaps the cells were not in proper receiving position when interhemispheric connecting fibers grew. This type of individual is currently thought to be able to focus a part of his or her brain (the right hemisphere) on three-dimensional tasks without the interference of verbal

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VIEWPOINT

mediation (left hemisphere). They are able to focus intently and narrowly on physical reality and are not distracted by incidental sociological information. When individuals say that a fantasy story does not "turn them on," do they really mean that only half of their brain is stimulated and the other half is bored? Does this type of person need "spacewarp physics" to occupy the right hemisphere while the psychological intrigue occupies the left?

If preference for certain types of story lines is a function of the interconnections of an individual's brain, then it is not surprising that strong opinions exist. The emphasis on the psychological aspects of a story found in language-arts lessons may be boring to some students because it only awakens part of their brain, while at the same time it is stimulating to those students whose hemispheres share tasks. If teachers want to "turn on" students with strong three-dimensional spatial ability, they should consider assigning stories whose story lines are largely devoted to developing three-dimensional images. Furthermore, the synthesis, analysis, and evaluation tasks which typically follow the reading of the story should ask questions about the physics of the science fiction story. Teachers should provide alternatives which allow for differences which may exist in the brain structure of their students.

We *are* our brains. Our interests and our boredom levels are controlled by a hundred billion nerve cells in the thick case called our skull. The way we perceive our environment and adapt to it, the way we plan and think and pay attention are all controlled by the structure of our brains. It is argued that all our impressions of the world come to us through our senses. On the other hand, mental imagery (produced by reading) may be as real to us in terms of brain stimulation as actual experience.

We implicitly assume that others perceive the world the way we do. Communication is

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essentially a sharing of experience, and if people don't have common experience, they can't communicate. Communication exists only if the experience is nearly identical in the two brains. It is entirely possible that people who are bored by different things have brains designed to be aroused in different ways and even in different regions. Do "physics" fiction readers share a common thought process with their language-arts teachers? Do these individuals *communicate?* If teachers are "early bloomers" whose brains are so interconnected that the two hemispheres share many tasks, should we be surprised that literature assignments favor "fantasy" fiction and that teachers are largely unaware of the existence of "physics" fiction readers in their classes?

As for me, I'll keep my chemical closet door filled with "physics" fiction so long as the language-arts classes focus exclusive attention on psychological aspects of "fantasy" science fiction. ●

ICE AGE

As we stare at the snow, the white bear plays.
We huddle together in greasy, worn hides,
Our cold-numbed fingers clasped to our sides,
Waiting for the good days, the warm days.
Ages from now, when all is forgiven,
Then once again we will live in
A land rich in meat, grain, herbs,
And, once again, in the suburbs
Spend the winter thinking
"Nature is against us,"
Watching the red sun's sinking
While we wait for the bus.

—Catherine Mintz

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Despite the fact that Ms. Willis recently won two Nebula awards (for "Fire Watch" and "A Letter from the Clearys"), the only thing she's asked us to mention here is that she wrote the following story while under a National Endowment for the Humanities grant. And a word of warning: if you're looking for the sort of subtly-plotted, understated story that one has come to expect from Ms. Willis—well, we're afraid you won't interface with one here.

by Connie Willis

art: Laura Lakey

BLUED MOON

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Mowen Chemical today announced implementation of an innovative waste emissions installation at its experimental facility in Chugwater, Wyoming. According to project directors Bradley McAfee and Lynn Saunders, nonutilizable hydrocarbonaceous substances will be propulsively transferred to stratospheric altitudinal locations, where photochemical decomposition will result in triatomic allotropism and formation of benign bicarbonaceous precipitates. Preliminary predictive databasing indicates positive ozonation yields without statistically significant shifts in lateral ecosystem equilibria.

"Do you suppose Walter Hunt would have invented the safety pin if he had known that punk rockers would stick them through their cheeks?" Mr. Mowen said. He was looking gloomily out the window at the distant 600-foot-high smokestacks.

"I don't know, Mr. Mowen," Janice said. She sighed. "Do you want me to tell them to wait again?"

The sigh was supposed to mean, It's after four o'clock and it's getting dark, and you've already asked Research to wait three times, and when are you going to make up your mind? but Mr. Mowen ignored it.

"On the other hand," he said. "What about diapers? And all those babies that would have been stuck with straight pins if it hadn't been for the safety pin?"

"It is supposed to help restore the ozone layer, Mr. Mowen," Janice said. "And according to Research, there won't be any harmful side effects."

"You shoot a bunch of hydrocarbons into the stratosphere, and there won't be any harmful side effects. According to Research." Mr. Mowen swivelled his chair around to look at Janice, nearly knocking over the picture of his daughter Sally that sat on his desk. "I stuck Sally once. With a safety pin. She screamed for an hour. How's that for a harmful side effect? And what about the stuff that's left over after all this ozone is formed? Bicarbonate of soda, Research says. Perfectly harmless. How do they know that? Have they ever dumped bicarbonate of soda on people before? Call Research . . ." he started to say, but Janice had already picked up the phone and tapped the number. She didn't even sigh. "Call Research and ask them to figure out what effect a bicarbonate of soda rain would have."

"Yes, Mr. Mowen," Janice said. She put the phone up to her ear and listened for a moment. "Mr. Mowen . . ." she said hesitantly.

"I suppose Research says it'll neutralize the sulfuric acid that's

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killing the statues and sweeten and deodorize at the same time."

"No, sir," Janice said. "Research says they've already started the temperature-differential kilns, and you should be seeing something in a few minutes. They say they couldn't wait any longer."

Mr. Mowen whipped back around in his chair to look out the window. The picture of Sally teetered again, and Mr. Mowen wondered if she were home from college yet. Nothing was coming out of the smokestacks. He couldn't see the candlestick-base kilns through the maze of fast-food places and trailer parks. A McDonald's sign directly in front of the smokestacks blinked on suddenly, and Mr. Mowen jumped. The smokestacks themselves remained silent and still except for their blinding strobe aircraft lights. He could see sagebrush-covered hills in the space between the stacks, and the whole scene, except for the McDonald's sign, looked unbelievably serene and harmless.

"Research says the kilns are fired to full capacity," Janice said, holding the phone against her chest.

Mr. Mowen braced himself for the coming explosion. There was a low rumbling like distant fire, then a puff of whitish smoke, and finally a deep, whooshing sound like one of Janice's sighs, and two columns of blue shot straight up into the darkening sky.

"Why is it blue?" Mr. Mowen said.

"I already asked," Janice said. "Research says visible spectrum diffraction is occurring because of the point eight micron radii of the hydrocarbons being propelled . . ."

"That sounds like that damned press release," Mr. Mowen said. "Tell them to speak English."

After a minute of talking into the phone, she said, "It's the same effect that causes the sunsets after a volcanic eruption. Scattering. Research wants to know what staff members you'd like to have at the press conference tomorrow."

"The directors of the project," Mr. Mowen said grumpily, "and anyone over at Research who can speak English."

Janice looked at the press release. "Bradley McAfee and Lynn Saunders are the directors," she said.

"Why does the name McAfee sound familiar?"

"He's Ulric Henry's roommate. The company linguist you hired to . . ."

"I know why I hired him. Invite Henry, too. And try to get Sally as soon as she gets home. Tell her that I expect her there; and tell her to dress up." He looked at his watch. "Well," he said. "It's

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been going five minutes, and there haven't been any harmful side effects yet."

The phone rang. Mr. Mowen jumped. "I knew it was too good to last," he said. "Who is it? The EPA?"

"No," Janice said, and sighed. "It's your ex-wife."

"I'm shut of that," Brad said when Ulric came in the door. He was sitting in the dark, the green glow of the monitor lighting his face. He tapped at the terminal keys for a minute more and then turned around. "All done. Slicker'n goose grease."

Ulric turned on the light. "The waste-emissions project?" he said.

"Nope. We turned that on this afternoon. Works prettier than a spotted pony. No, I been spending the last hour erasing my fiancée Lynn's name from the project records."

"Won't Lynn object to that?" Ulric said, fairly calmly, mostly because he did not have a very clear idea of which one Lynn was. He never could tell Brad's fiancées apart. They all sounded exactly the same.

"She won't hear tell of it till it's too late," Brad said. "She's on her way to Cheyenne to catch a plane back east. Her mother's all het up about getting a divorce. Caught her husband Adam 'n' Evin'."

If there was anything harder to put up with than Brad's rottenness, it was his incredibly good luck. While Ulric was sure Brad was low enough to engineer a sudden family crisis to get Lynn out of Chugwater, he was just as sure that he had had no need to. It was a lucky coincidence that Lynn's mother was getting a divorce just now, and lucky coincidences were Brad's specialty. How else could he have kept three fiancées from ever meeting each other in the small confines of Chugwater and Mowen Chemical?

"Lynn?" Ulric said. "Which one is that? The redhead in programming?"

"Nope, that's Sue. Lynn's little and yellow-haired and smart as a whip about chemical engineering. Kind of a dodunk about everythin' else."

"Dodunk," Ulric said to himself. He should make a note to look that up. It probably meant "one so foolish as to associate with Brad McAfee." That definitely included him. He had agreed to room with Brad because he was so surprised at being hired that it had not occurred to him to ask for an apartment of his own.

He had graduated with an English degree that everyone had

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told him was worse than useless in Wyoming, and which he very soon found out was. In desperation, he had applied for a factory job at Mowen Chemical and been hired on as company linguist at an amazing salary for reasons that had not yet become clear, though he had been at Mowen for over three months. What *had* become clear was that Brad McAfee was, to use his own colorful language, a thimblerigger, a pigeon plucker, a hornswoggler. He was steadily working his way toward the boss's daughter and the ownership of Mowen Chemical, leaving a trail of young women behind him who all apparently believed that a man who pronounced fiancée "fee-an-see" couldn't possibly have more than one. It was an interesting linguistic phenomenon.

At first Ulric had been taken in by Brad's homespun talk, too, even though it didn't seem to match his sophisticated abilities on the computer. Then one day he had gotten up early and caught Brad working on a program called "Project Sally."

"I'm gonna be the president of Mowen Chemical in two shakes of a sheep's tail," Brad had said. "This little dingclinker is my master plan. What do you think of it?"

What Ulric thought of it could not be expressed in words. It outlined a plan for getting close to Sally Mowen and impressing her father based almost entirely on the seduction and abandonment of young women in key positions at Mowen Chemical. Three-quarters of the way down he saw Lynn's name.

"What if Mr. Mowen gets hold of this program?" Ulric had said finally.

"Not a look-in chance that that'd happen. I got this program locked up tighter than a hog's eye. And if anybody else tried to copy it, they'd be sorrier than a coon romancin' a polecat."

Since then Ulric had put in six requests for an apartment, all of which had been turned down "due to restrictive areal housing availability," which Ulric supposed meant there weren't any empty apartments in Chugwater. All of the turndowns were initialed by Mr. Mowen's secretary, and there were moments when Ulric thought that Mr. Mowen knew about "Project Sally" after all and had hired Ulric to keep Brad away from his daughter.

"According to my program, it's time to go to work on Sally," Brad said now. "Tomorrow at this press conference. I'm enough of a rumbustigator with this waste-emissions project to dazzlefy Old Man Mowen. Sally's going to be there. I got my fiancée Gail in publicity to invite her."

"I'm going to be there, too," Ulric said belligerently.

"Now, that's right lucky," Brad said. "You can do a little hon-

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eyfuggling for me. Work on old Sally while I give Pappy Mowen the glad hand. Do you know what she looks like?"

"I have no intention of honeyfuggling Sally Mowen for you," Ulric said, and wondered again where Brad managed to pick up all these slang expressions. He had caught Brad watching Judy Canova movies on TV a couple of times, but some of these words weren't even in Mencken. He probably had a computer program that generated them. "In fact, I intend to tell her you're engaged to more than one person already."

"Boy, you're sure wadgetty," Brad said. "And you know why? Because you don't have a gal of your own. Tell you what, you pick out one of mine, and I'll give her to you. How about Sue?"

Ulric walked over to the window. "I don't want her," he said.

"I bet you don't even know which one she is," Brad said.

I don't, Ulric thought. They all sound exactly alike. They use "interface" as a verb and "support" as an adjective. One of them had called for Brad and when Ulric told her he was over at Research, she had said, "Sorry. My wetware's nonfunctional this morning." Ulric felt as if he were living in a foreign country.

"What difference does it make?" Ulric said angrily. "Not one of them speaks English, which is probably why they're all dumb enough to think they're engaged to you."

"How about if I get you a gal who speaks English and you honeyfuggle Sally Mowen for me?" Brad said. He turned to the terminal and began typing furiously. "What exactly do you want?"

Ulric clenched his fists and looked out the window. The dead cottonwood under the window had a kite or something caught in its branches. He debated climbing down the tree and walking over to Mr. Mowen's office to demand an apartment.

"Makes no never mind," Brad said when he didn't answer. "I've heard you oratin' often enough on the subject." He typed a minute more and hit the print button. "There," he said.

Ulric turned around.

Brad read from the monitor, " 'Wanted: Young woman who can generate enthusiasm for the Queen's English, needs to use correct grammar and syntax, no gobbledygook, no slang, respect for the language. Signed, Ulric Henry.' What do you think of that? It's the spittin' image of the way you talk."

"I can find my own 'gals,' " Ulric said. He yanked the sheet of paper as it was still coming out of the printer, ripping over half the sheet in a long ragged diagonal. Now it read, "Wanted: Young woman who can generate language. Ulric H"

"I'll swap you horses," Brad said. "If this don't rope you in a

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nice little filly, I'll give you Lynn when she gets back. It'll cheer her up, after getting her name taken off the project and all. What do you think of that?"

Ulric put the scrap of paper down carefully on the table, trying to resist the impulse to wad it up and cram it down Brad's throat. He slammed the window up. There was a sudden burst of chilly wind, and the paper on the table balanced uneasily and then drifted onto the windowsill.

"What if Lynn misses her plane in Cheyenne?" Ulric said. "What if she comes back here and runs into one of your other fiancées?"

"No chance on the map," Brad said cheerfully. "I got me a program for that, too." He tore the rest of the paper out of the printer and wadded it up. "Two of my fiancées come callin' at the same time, they have to come up in the elevators, and there's only two of them. They work on the same signals, so I made me up a program that stops the elevators between floors if my security code gets read in more than once in an hour. It makes an override beep go off on my terminal, too, so's I can soft-shoe the first gal down the back stairs." He stood up. "I gotta go over to Research and check on the waste-emissions project again. You better find yourself a gal right quick. You're givin' me the flit-flats with all this unfriendly talk."

He grabbed his coat off the back of the chair and went out. He slammed the door, perhaps because he had the flit-flats, and the resultant breeze hit the scrap of paper on the windowsill and sailed it neatly out the window.

"Flit-flats," Ulric mumbled to himself, and tried to call Mowen's office. The line was busy.

Sally Mowen called her father as soon as she got home. "Hi, Janice," she said. "Is Dad there?"

"He just left," Janice said. "But I have a feeling he might stop by Research. He's worried about the new stratospheric waste-emissions project."

"I'll walk over and meet him."

"Your father said to tell you there's a press conference tomorrow at eleven. Are you at your terminal?"

"Yes," Sally said, and flicked the power on.

"I'll send the press releases for you so you'll know what's going on."

Sally was going to say that she had already received an invitation to the press conference and the accompanying PR material

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from someone named Gail, but changed her mind when she saw what was being printed out on the printer. "You didn't send me the press releases," she said. "You sent me a bio on somebody named Ulric Henry. Who's he?"

"I did?" Janice said, sounding flustered. "I'll try it again."

Sally held up the tail of the printout sheet as it came rolling out of the computer. "Now I've got a picture of him." The picture showed a dark-haired young man with an expression somewhere between dismay and displeasure. I'll bet someone just told him she thought they could have a viable relationship, Sally thought. "Who is he?"

Janice sighed, a quick, flustered kind of sigh. "I didn't mean to send that to you. He's the company linguist. I think your father invited him to the press conference to write press releases."

I thought the press releases were already done and you were sending them to me, Sally thought, but she said, "When did my father hire a linguist?"

"Last summer," Janice said, sounding even more flustered. "How's school?"

"Fine," Sally said. "And no, I'm not getting married. I'm not even having a viable relationship, whatever that is."

"Your mother called today. She's in Cheyenne at a NOW rally," Janice said, which sounded like a non sequitur, but wasn't. With a mother like Sally's, it was no wonder her father worried himself sick over who Sally might marry. Sometimes Sally worried, too. Viable relationship.

"How did Charlotte sound?" Sally said. "No, wait. I already know. Look, don't worry about the press conference stuff. I already know all about it. Gail Somebody in publicity sent me an invitation. That's why I came home for Thanksgiving a day early."

"She did?" Janice said. "Your father didn't mention it. He probably forgot. He's been a little worried about this project," she said, which must be the understatement of the year, Sally thought, if he'd managed to rattle Janice. "So you haven't met anyone nice?"

"No," Sally said. "Yes. I'll tell you tomorrow." She hung up. They're all nice, she thought. That isn't the problem. They're nice, but they're incoherent. A viable relationship. What on earth was that? And what was "respecting your personal space?" Or "fulfilling each other's socio-economic needs?" I have no idea what they are talking about, Sally thought. I have been going out with a bunch of foreigners.

She put her coat and her hat back on and started down in the elevator to find her father. Poor man. He knew what it was like

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to be married to someone who didn't speak English. She could imagine what the conversation with her mother had been like. All sisters and sexist pigs. She hadn't been speaking ERA very long. The last time she called, she had been speaking EST and the time before that California. It was no wonder Sally's father had hired a secretary that communicated almost entirely through sighs, and that Sally had majored in English.

Tomorrow at the press conference would be dreadful. She would be surrounded by nice young men who spoke Big Business or Computer or Bachelor on the Make, and she would not understand a word they said.

It suddenly occurred to her that the company linguist, Ulric something, might speak English, and she punched in her security code all over again and went back up in the elevator to get the printout with his address on it. She decided to go through the oriental gardens to get to Research instead of taking the car. She told herself it was shorter, which was true, but she was really thinking that if she went through them, she would go past the housing unit where Ulric Henry lived.

The oriental gardens had originally been designed as a shortcut through the maze of fast-food places that had sprung up around Mowen Chemical, making it impossible to get anywhere quickly. Her father had purposely stuck Mowen Chemical on the outskirts of Chugwater so the plant wouldn't disturb the natives, trying to make the original buildings and housing blend in to the Wyoming landscape. The natives had promptly disturbed Mowen Chemical, so that by the time they built the Research complex and computer center, the only land not covered with Kentucky Fried Chickens and Arbys was in the older part of town and very far from the original buildings. Mr. Mowen had given up trying not to disturb the natives. He had built the oriental gardens so that at least people could get from home to work and back again without being run over by the Chugwaterians. Actually, he had intended just to put in a brick path that would wind through the original Mowen buildings and connect them with the new ones, but at the time Charlotte had been speaking Zen. She had insisted on bonsais and a curving bridge over the irrigation ditch. Before the landscaping was finished, she had switched to an Anti-Watt dialect that had put an end to the marriage and sent Sally flying off east to school. During that same period her mother had campaigned to save the dead cottonwood she was standing under now, picketing her husband's office with signs that read, "Tree Murderer!"

Sally stood under the dead cottonwood tree, counting the win-

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dows so she could figure out which was Ulric Henry's apartment. There were three windows on the sixth floor with lights in all three, and the middle window was open for some unknown reason, but it would require an incredible coincidence to have Ulric Henry come and stand at one of the windows while Sally was standing there so she could shout up to him, "Do you speak English?"

I wasn't looking for him anyway, she told herself stubbornly. I'm on my way to meet my father, and I stopped to look at the moon. My, it certainly is a peculiar blue color tonight. She stood a few minutes longer under the tree, pretending to look at the moon, but it was getting very cold, the moon did not seem to be getting any bluer, and even if it were, it did not seem like an adequate reason for freezing to death, so she pulled her hat down farther over her ears and walked past the bonsais and over the curved bridge towards Research.

As soon as she was across the bridge, Ulric Henry came to the middle window and shut it. The movement of pulling the window shut made a little breeze. The torn piece of printout paper that had been resting on the ledge fluttered to a place closer to the edge and then went over, drifting down in the bluish moonlight past the kite, and coming to rest on the second lowest branch of the cottonwood tree. .

Wednesday morning Mr. Mowen got up early so he could get some work done at the office before the press conference. Sally wasn't up yet, so he put the coffee on and went into the bathroom to shave. He plugged his electric razor into the outlet above the sink, and the light over the mirror promptly went out. He took the cord out of the outlet and unscrewed the blackened bulb. Then he pattered into the kitchen in his bare feet to look for another light bulb.

He put the burned-out bulb gently in the wastebasket next to the sink and began opening cupboards. He picked up the syrup bottle to look behind it. The lid was not screwed on tightly, and the syrup bottle dropped with a thud onto its side and began oozing syrup all over the cupboard. Mr. Mowen grabbed a paper towel, which tore in a ragged, useless diagonal, and tried to mop it up. He knocked the salt shaker over into the pool of syrup. He grabbed the other half of the paper towel and turned on the hot water faucet to wet it. The water came out in a steaming blast.

Mr. Mowen jumped sideways to get out of the path of the boiling water and knocked over the wastebasket. The light bulb bounced out and smashed onto the kitchen floor. Mr. Mowen stepped on

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a large ragged piece. He tore off more paper towels to stanch the blood and limped back to the bathroom, walking on the side of his bleeding foot, to get a bandaid.

He had forgotten about the light in the bathroom being burned out. Mr. Mowen felt his way to the medicine cabinet, knocking the shampoo and a box of Q-Tips into the sink before he found the bandaids. The shampoo lid wasn't screwed on tightly either. He took the metal box of bandaids back to the kitchen.

It was bent, and Mr. Mowen got a dent in his thumb trying to pry the lid off. As he was pushing on it, the lid suddenly sprang free, spraying bandaids all over the kitchen floor. Mr. Mowen picked one up, being careful to avoid the pieces of light bulb, ripped the end off the wrapper, and pulled on the orange string. The string came out. Mr. Mowen looked at the string for a long minute and then tried to open the bandaid from the back.

When Sally came into the kitchen, Mr. Mowen was sitting on a kitchen chair sucking his bleeding thumb and holding a piece of paper towel to his other foot. "What happened?" she said.

"I cut myself on a broken light bulb," Mr. Mowen said. "It went out while I was trying to shave."

She grabbed for a piece of paper towelling. It tore off cleanly at the perforation, and Sally wrapped Mr. Mowen's thumb in it. "You know better than to try to pick up a broken light bulb," she said. "You should have gotten a broom."

"I did not try to pick up the light bulb," he said. "I cut my thumb on a bandaid. I cut my *feet* on the light bulb."

"Oh, I see," Sally said. "Don't you know better than to try to pick up a light bulb with your feet?"

"This isn't funny," Mr. Mowen said indignantly. "I am in a lot of pain."

"I know it isn't funny," Sally said. She picked a bandaid up off the floor, tore off the end, and pulled the string neatly along the edge of the wrapping. "Are you going to be able to make it to your press conference?"

"Of course I'm going to be able to make it. And I expect you to be there, too."

"I will," Sally said, peeling another bandaid and applying it to the bottom of his foot. "I'm going to leave as soon as I get this mess cleaned up so I can walk over. Or would you like me to drive you?"

"I can drive myself," Mr. Mowen said, starting to get up.

"You stay right there until I get your slippers," Sally said, and

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darted out of the kitchen. The phone rang. "I'll get it," Sally called from the bedroom. "You don't budge out of that chair."

Mr. Mowen picked a bandaid up off the floor, tore the end off of it, and peeled the string along the side, which made him feel considerably better. My luck must be starting to change, he thought. "Who's on the phone?" he said cheerfully, as Sally came back into the kitchen carrying his slippers and the phone.

She plugged the phone cord into the wall and handed him the receiver. "It's Mother," she said. "She wants to talk to the sexist pig."

Ulric was getting dressed for the press conference when the phone rang. He let Brad answer it. When he walked into the living room, Brad was hanging up the phone.

"Lynn missed her plane," Brad said.

Ulric looked up hopefully. "She did?"

"Yes. She's taking one out this afternoon. While she was shooting the breeze, she let fall she'd signed her name on the press release that was sent out on the computer."

"And Mowen's already read it," Ulric said. "So he'll know you stole the project away from her." He was in no mood to mince words. He had lain awake most of the night trying to decide what to say to Sally Mowen. What if he told her about "Project Sally" and she looked blankly at him and said, "Sorry. My wetware is inoperable."?

"I didn't steal the project," Brad said amiably. "I just sort of skyugled it away from her when she wasn't looking. And I already got it back. I called Gail as soon as Lynn hung up and asked her to take Lynn's name off the press releases before Old Man Mowen saw them. It was right lucky, Lynn missing her plane and all."

Ulric put his down parka on over his sports coat.

"Are you heading for the press conference?" Brad said. "Wait till I rig myself out, and I'll ride over with you."

"I'm walking," Ulric said, and opened the door.

The phone rang. Brad answered it. "No, I wasn't watching the morning movie," Brad said, "but I'd take it big if you'd let me gander a guess anyway. I'll say the movie is *Carolina Cannonball* and the jackpot is six hundred and fifty-one dollars. That's right? Well, bust my buttons. That was a right lucky guess."

Ulric slammed the door behind him.

When Mr. Mowen still wasn't in the office by ten, Janice called him at home. She got a busy signal. She sighed, waited a minute,

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and tried again. The line was still busy. Before she could hang up, the phone flashed an incoming call. She punched the button. "Mr. Mowen's office," she said.

"Hi," the voice on the phone said. "This is Gail over in publicity. The press releases contain an inoperable statement. You haven't sent any out, have you?"

I tried, Janice thought with a little sigh. "No," she said.

"Good. I wanted to confirm non-release before I effected the deletion."

"What deletion?" Janice said. She tried to call up the press release but got a picture of Ulric Henry instead.

"The release catalogs Lynn Saunders as co-designer of the project."

"I thought she *was* co-designer."

"Oh, no," Gail said. "My fiancé Brad McAfee designed the whole project. I'm glad the number of printouts is non-significant."

After Gail hung up, Janice tried Mr. Mowen again. The line was still busy. Janice called up the company directory on her terminal, got a resumé on Ulric Henry instead, and called the Chugwater operator on the phone. The operator gave her Lynn Saunders's number. Janice called Lynn and got her roommate.

"She's not here," the roommate said. "She had to leave for back east as soon as she was done with the waste-emissions thing. Her mother was doing head trips on her. She was really bummed out by it."

"Do you have a number where I could reach her?" Janice asked.

"I sure don't," the roommate said. "She wasn't with it at all when she left. Her fiancé might have a number."

"Her fiancé?"

"Yeah. Brad McAfee."

"I think if she calls you'd better have her call me. Priority." Janice hung up the phone. She called up the company directory on her terminal again and got the press release for the new emissions project. Lynn's name was nowhere on it. She sighed, an odd, angry sigh, and tried Mr. Mowen's number again. It was still busy.

On Sally's way past Ulric Henry's housing unit, she noticed something fluttering high up in the dead cottonwood tree. The remains of a kite were tangled at the very top, and just out of reach, on the second lowest branch, there was a piece of white paper. She tried a couple of halfhearted jumps, swiping at the paper with her hand, but she succeeded only in blowing the paper

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farther out of reach. If she could get the paper down, she could take it up to Ulric Henry's apartment and ask him if it had fallen out of his window. She looked around for a stick and then stood still, feeling foolish. There was no more reason to go after the paper than to attempt to get the ruined kite down, she told herself, but even as she thought that, she was measuring the height of the branches to see if she could get a foot up and reach the paper from there. One branch wouldn't do it, but two might. There was no one in the gardens. This is ridiculous, she told herself, and swung up into the crotch of the tree.

She climbed swiftly up to the third branch, stretched out across it, and reached for the paper. Her fingers did not quite reach, so she straightened up again, hanging onto the trunk to get her balance, and made a kind of down-sweeping lunge toward the piece of paper. She lost her balance and nearly missed the branch, and the wind she had created by her sudden movement blew the paper all the way to the end of the branch, where it teetered precariously but did not fall off.

Someone was coming across the curving bridge. She blew a couple of times on the paper and then stopped. She was going to have to go out on the branch. Maybe the paper is blank, she thought. I can hardly take a blank piece of paper to Ulric Henry, but she was already testing the weight of the branch with her hand. It seemed firm enough, and she began to edge out onto the dead branch, holding onto the trunk until the last possible moment and then dropping into an inching crawl that brought her directly over the sidewalk. From there she was able to reach the paper easily.

The paper was part of a printout from a computer, torn raggedly at an angle. It read, "Wanted: Young woman who can generate language. Ulric H." The *ge* in "language" was missing, but otherwise the message made perfect sense, which she would have thought was peculiar if she had not been so surprised at the message. Her area of special study was language generation. She had spent all last week in class doing it, using all the rules of linguistic change on existing words: generalization and specialization of meaning, change in part of speech, shortening, and prepositional verb clustering to create a new-sounding language. It had been almost impossible to do at first, but by the end of the week, she had greeted her professor with, "Good aft. I readed up my book taskings," without even thinking about it. She could certainly do the same thing with Ulric Henry, whom she had been wanting to meet anyway.

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She had forgotten about the man she had seen coming across the bridge. He was almost to the tree now. In approximately ten more steps he would look up and see her crouched there like an insane vulture. How will I explain this to my father if anyone sees me? she thought, and put a cautious foot behind her. She was still wondering when the branch gave way.

Mr. Mowen did not leave for the press conference until a quarter to eleven. He had still been on the phone with Charlotte when Sally left, and when he had asked Charlotte to wait a minute so he could tell Sally to wait and he'd drive her over, Charlotte had called him a sexist tyrant and accused him of stifling Sally's dominant traits by repressive male psychological intimidation. Mr. Mowen had had no idea what she was talking about.

Sally had swept up the glass and put a new light bulb in the bathroom before she left, but Mr. Mowen had decided not to tempt fate. He had shaved with a disposable razor instead. Leaning over to get a piece of toilet paper to put on the cut on his chin, he had cracked his head on the medicine cabinet door. After that, he had sat very still on the edge of the tub for nearly half an hour, wishing Sally were home so she could help him get dressed.

At the end of the half hour, Mr. Mowen decided that stress was the cause of the series of coincidences that had plagued him all morning (Charlotte had spoken Biofeedback for a couple of weeks) and that if he just relaxed, everything would be all right. He took several deep, calming breaths and stood up. The medicine cabinet was still open.

By moving very carefully and looking for hazards everywhere, Mr. Mowen managed to get dressed and out to the car. He had not been able to find any socks that matched, and the elevator had taken him all the way to the roof, but Mr. Mowen breathed deeply and calmly each time, and he was even beginning to feel relaxed by the time he opened the door to the car.

He got into the car and shut the door. It caught the tail of his coat. He opened the door again and leaned over to pull the coat out of the way. One of his gloves fell out of his pocket onto the ground. He leaned over farther to rescue the glove and cracked his head on the armrest of the door.

He took a deep, rather ragged breath, snagged the glove, and pulled the door shut. He took the keys out of his pocket and inserted the car key in the ignition. The key chain snapped open and scattered the rest of his keys all over the floor of the front seat. When he bent over to pick them up, being very careful not

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to hit his head on the steering wheel, his other glove fell out of his pocket. He left the keys where they were and straightened up again, watching out for the turn signals and the sun visor. He turned the key with its still dangling key chain. The car wouldn't start.

Very slowly and carefully he got out of the car and went back up to the apartment to call Janice and tell her to cancel the press conference. The phone was busy.

Ulric didn't see the young woman until she was nearly on top of him. He had been walking with his head down and his hands jammed into the pockets of his parka, thinking about the press conference. He had left the apartment without his watch and walked very rapidly over to Research. He had been over an hour early, and no one had been there except one of Brad's fiancées whose name he couldn't remember. She had said, "Your biological clock is nonfunctional. Your biorhythms must be low today," and he had told her they were, even though he had no idea what they were talking about.

He had walked back across the oriental gardens, feeling desperate. He was not sure he could stand the press conference, even to warn Sally Mowen. Maybe he should forget about going and walk all over Chugwater instead, grabbing young women by the arm and saying, "Do you speak English?"

While he was considering this idea, there was a loud snap overhead, and the young woman fell on him. He tried to get his hands out of his pockets to catch her, but it took him a moment to realize that he was under the cottonwood tree and that the snap was the sound of a branch breaking, so he didn't succeed. He did get one hand out of his pocket and he did take one bracing step back, but it wasn't enough. She landed on him full force, and they rolled off the sidewalk and onto the leaves. When they came to a stop, Ulric was on top of her, with one arm under her and the other one flung above her head. Her wool hat had come off and her hair was spread out nicely against the frost-rimed leaves. His hand was tangled in her hair. She was looking up at him as if she knew him. It did not even occur to him to ask her if she spoke English.

After awhile it did occur to him that he was going to be late to the press conference. The hell with the press conference, he thought. The hell with Sally Mowen, and kissed her again. After a few more minutes of that, his arm began to go numb, and he

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disengaged his hand from her hair and put his weight on it to pull himself up.

She didn't move, even when he got onto his knees beside her and extended a hand to help her up. She lay there, looking up at him as if she were thinking hard about something. Then she seemed to come to a decision because she took his hand and let him pull her up. She pointed above and behind him. "The moon blues," she said.

"What?" he said. He wondered if the branch had cracked her on the head.

She was still pointing. "The moon blues," she said again. "It blued up some last dark, but now it blues moreishly."

He turned to look in the direction she was pointing, and sure enough, the three-quarters moon was a bright blue in the morning sky, which explained what she was talking about, but not the way she was talking. "Are you all right?" he said. "You're not hurt, are you?" She shook her head. You never ask someone with a concussion if they are all right, he thought. "Does your head hurt?"

She shook her head again. Maybe she wasn't hurt. Maybe she was a foreign exchange consultant in Research. "Where are you from?" he said.

She looked surprised. "I falled down of the tree. You catched me with your face." She brushed the cottonwood leaves out of her hair and put her wool hat back on.

She understood everything he said, and she was definitely speaking English words even though the effect wasn't much like English. You catched me with your face. Irregular verb into regular. The moon blues. Adjective becomes verb. Those were both ways language evolved. "What were you doing in the tree?" he said, so she would talk some more.

"I hidinged in the tree for cause people point you with their faces when you English oddishly."

English oddishly. "You're generating language, aren't you?" Ulric said. "Do you know Brad McAfee?"

She looked blank, and a little surprised, the way Brad had probably told her to when he put her up to this. He wondered which one of Brad's fiancées this was. Probably the one in programming. They had had to come up with all this generated language somewhere. "I'm late for a press conference," he said sharply, "as you well know. I've got to talk to Sally Mowen." He didn't put out his hand to help her up. "You can go tell Brad his little honeyfuggling scheme didn't work."

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She stood up without his help and walked across the sidewalk, past the fallen branch. She knelt down and picked up a scrap of paper and looked at it for a long time. He considered yanking it out of her hand and looking at it since it was probably Brad's language generation program, but he didn't. She folded it and put it in her pocket.

"You can tell him your kissing me didn't work," he said, which was a lie. He wanted to kiss her again as he said it, and that made him angrier than ever. Brad had probably told her he was wadgetty, that what he needed was a half hour in the leaves with her. "I'm still going to tell Sally."

She looked at him from the other side of the sidewalk.

"And don't get any ideas about trying to stop me." He was shouting now. "Because they won't work."

His anger got him over the curving bridge. Then it occurred to him that even if she was one of Brad's fiancées, even if she had been hired to kiss him in the leaves and keep him from going to the press conference, he was in love with her, and he went tearing back, but she was nowhere in sight.

At a little after eleven Janice got a call from Gail in publicity. "Where is Mr. Mowen? He hasn't shown up, and my media credibility is effectively nonfunctional."

"I'll try to call him at home," Janice said. She put Gail on hold and dialed Mr. Mowen's apartment. The line was busy. When she punched up the hold button to tell Gail that, the line went dead. Janice tried to call her back. The line was busy.

She typed in the code for a priority that would override whatever was on Mr. Mowen's home terminal. After the code, she typed, "Call Janice at office." She looked at it for a minute, then back-erased and typed, "Press conference. Research. Eleven a.m.," and pressed RUN. The screen clicked once and displayed the preliminary test results of side effects on the waste-emissions project. At the bottom of the screen, she read, "Tangential consequences statistically negligible."

"You want to bet?" Janice said.

She called programming. "There's something wrong with my terminal," she said to the woman on the line.

"This is Sue in peripherals rectification. Is your problem in implementation or hardware?"

She sounded just like Gail in publicity. "You wouldn't know Brad McAfee, would you?" she said.

"He's my fiancé." Sue said. "Why?"

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Janice sighed. "I keep getting readouts that have nothing to do with what I punch in," Janice said.

"Oh, then you want hardware repair. The number's in your terminal directory," she said, and hung up.

Janice called up the terminal directory. At first nothing happened. Then the screen clicked once and displayed something titled, "Project Sally." Janice noticed Lynn Saunders's name three-quarters of the way down the screen, and Sally Mowen's at the bottom. She started at the top and read it all the way through. Then she typed in PRINT and read it again as it came rolling out of the printer. When it was done, she tore off the sheet carefully, put it in a file folder, and put the file folder in her desk.

"I found your glove in the elevator," Sally said when she came in. She looked terrible, as if the experience of finding Mr. Mowen's glove had been too much for her. "Is the press conference over?"

"I didn't go," Mr. Mowen said. "I was afraid I'd run into a tree. Could you drive me over to the office? I told Janice I'd be there by nine and it's two-thirty."

"Tree?" Sally said. "I fell out of a tree today. On a linguist."

Mr. Mowen put on his overcoat and fished around in the pockets. "I've lost my other glove," he said. "That makes fifty-eight instances of bad luck I've had already this morning, and I've been sitting stock still for the last two hours. I made a list. The pencil broke, and the eraser, and I erased a hole right through the paper, and I didn't even count those." He put the single glove in his coat pocket.

Sally opened the door for him, and they went down the hall to the elevator. "I never should have said that about the moon," she said. "I should have said hello. Just a simple hello. So what if the note said he wanted someone who could generate language? That didn't mean I had to do it right then, before I even told him who I was."

Mr. Mowen punched his security code into the elevator. The REJECT light came on. "Fifty-nine," Mr. Mowen said. "That's too many coincidences to just be a coincidence. And all bad. If I didn't know better, I'd say someone was trying to kill me."

Sally punched in her security code. The elevator slid open. "I've been walking around for hours, trying to figure out how I could have been so stupid," Sally said. "He was on his way to meet me. At the press conference. He had something to tell me. If I'd just stood up after I fell on him and said, 'Hello, I'm Sally Mowen, and I've found this note. Do you really want someone who can generate

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language?' but, oh, no, I have to say, 'The moon blues.' I should have just kept kissing him and never said anything. But, oh, no, I couldn't let well enough alone."

Mr. Mowen let Sally push the floor button in the elevator so no more warning lights would flash on. He also let her open the door of the apartment building. On the way out to the car, he stepped in some gum.

"Sixty. If I didn't know better, I'd say your mother was behind this," Mr. Mowen said. "She's coming up here this afternoon. To see if I'm minimizing your self-realization potential with my chauvinistic role expectations. That should count for a dozen bad coincidences all by itself." He got in the car, hunching far back in the seat so he wouldn't crack his head on the sun visor. He peered out the window at the gray sky. "Maybe there'll be a blizzard and she won't be able to get up from Cheyenne."

Sally reached for something under the driver's seat. "Here's your other glove," she said, handed it over to him, and started the car. "That note was torn in half. Why didn't I think about the words that were missing instead of deciding the message was all there? He probably wanted somebody who could generate electricity and speak a foreign language. Just because I liked his picture and I thought he might speak English I had to go and make a complete fool out of myself."

It started to snow halfway to the office. Sally turned on the windshield wipers. "With my luck," Mr. Mowen said, "there'll be a blizzard, and I'll be snowed in with Charlotte." He looked out the side window at the smokestacks. They were shooting another wavery blue blast into the air. "It's the waste-emissions project. Somehow it's causing all these damn coincidences."

Sally said, "I look and look for someone who speaks decent English, and when I finally meet him, what do I say? 'You catched me with your face.' And now he thinks somebody named Brad McAfee put me up to it to keep him from getting to a press conference, and he'll never speak to me again. Stupid! How could I have been so stupid?"

"I never should have let them start the project without more testing," Mr. Mowen said. "What if we're putting too much ozone into the ozone layer? What if this bicarbonate of soda fallout is doing something to people's digestion? No measurable side effects, they said. Well, how do you measure bad luck? By the fatality rates?"

• Sally had pulled into a parking space directly in front of Mr. Mowen's office. It was snowing hard now. Mr. Mowen pulled on

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the glove Sally had handed him. He fished in his pocket for the other one. "Sixty-one," he said. "Sally, will you go in with me? I'll never get the elevator to work."

Sally walked with him into the building. On the way up in the elevator, she said, "If you're so convinced the waste-emissions project is causing your bad luck, why don't you tell Research to turn it off?"

"They'd never believe me. Whoever heard of coincidences as a side effect of trash?"

They went into the outer office. Janice said, "Hello!" as if they had returned from an arctic expedition. Mr. Mowen said, "Thanks, Sally. I think I can make it from here." He patted her on the shoulder. "Why don't you go explain what happened to this young man and tell him you're sorry?"

"I don't think that would work," Sally said. She kissed him on the cheek. "We're in bad shape, aren't we?"

Mr. Mowen turned to Janice. "Get me Research, and don't let my wife in," he said, went into his office, and shut the door. There was a crash and the muffled sound of Mr. Mowen swearing.

Janice sighed. "This young man of yours," she said to Sally. "His name wouldn't be Brad McAfee, would it?"

"No," Sally said, "but he thinks it is." On the way to the elevator she stopped and picked up Mr. Mowen's glove and put it in her pocket.

After Mr. Mowen's secretary hung up, Sue called Brad. She wasn't sure what the connection was between Brad and Mr. Mowen's secretary's terminal not working, but she thought she'd better let him know that Mr. Mowen's secretary knew his name.

There was no answer. She tried again at lunch and again on her afternoon break. The third time the line was busy. At a quarter of three her supervisor came in and told Sue she could leave early since heavy snow was predicted for rush hour. Sue tried Brad's number one more time to make sure he was there. It was still busy.

It was a good thing she was getting off early. She had only worn a sweater to work, and it was already snowing so hard she could hardly see out the window. She had worn sandals, too. Somebody had left a pair of bright blue moon boots in the coatroom, so she pulled those on over her sandals and went out to the parking lot. She wiped the snow off the windshield with the sleeve of her sweater, and started over to Brad's apartment.

* * *

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"You didn't meander on over to the press conference," Brad said when Ulric came in.

"No," Ulric said. He didn't take off his coat.

"Old Man Mowen didn't either. Which was right lucky, because I got to jaw with all those reporters instead of him. Where did you go off to? You look colder than an otter on a snowslide."

"I was with the 'gal' you found for me. The one you had jump me so I wouldn't go to the press conference and ruin your chances with Sally Mowen."

Brad was sitting at his terminal. "Sally wasn't there, which turned out to be right lucky because I met this reporter name of Jill who . . ." He turned around and looked at Ulric. "What gal are you talking about?"

"The one you had conveniently fall out of a tree on me. I take it she was one of your spare fiancées. What did you do? Make her climb out of the apartment window?"

"Now let me get this straight. Some gal fell out of that old cottonwood on top of you? And you think I did it?"

"Well, if you didn't, it was an amazing coincidence that the branch broke just as I was passing under it and an even more amazing coincidence that she generated language, which was just what that printout you came up with read. But the most amazing coincidence of all is the punch in the nose you're going to get right now."

"Now, don't get so dudfoozled. I didn't drop no gal on you, and if I'm lyin', let me be kicked to death by grasshoppers. If I was going to do something like that, I'd have gotten you one who could speak good English, like you wanted, not . . . what did you say she did? Generated language?"

"You expect me to believe it's all some kind of coincidence?" Ulric shouted. "What kind of . . . of . . . dodunk do you take me for?"

"I'll admit it is a pretty seldom thing to have happen," Brad said thoughtfully. "This morning I found me a hundred dollar bill on the way to the press conference. Then I meet this reporter Jill and we get to talking and we have a whole lot in common like her favorite movie is *Lay that Rifle Down* with Judy Canova in it, and then it turns out she's Sally Mowen's roommate last year in college."

The phone rang. Brad picked it up. "Well, ginger peachy. Come on over. It's the big housing unit next to the oriental gardens. Apartment 6B." He hung up the phone. "Now that's just what I been talking about. That was that gal reporter on the phone. I

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asked her to come over so's I could honeyfuggle her into introducing me to Sally, and she says she can't 'cause she's gotta catch a plane outta Cheyenne. But now she says the highway's closed, and she's stuck here in Chugwater. Now that kind of good luck doesn't happen once in a blue moon."

"What?" Ulric said, and unclenched his fists for the first time since he'd come into the room. He went over to look out the window. He couldn't see the moon that had been in the sky earlier. He supposed it had long since set, and anyway it was starting to snow. "The moon blues," he said softly to himself.

"Since she is coming over here, maybe you should skedaddle so as not to spoil this run of good luck I am having."

Ulric pulled *Collected American Slang* out of the bookcase and looked up, "moon, blue" in the index. The entry read, "Once in a blue moon: rare, as an unusual coincidence, orig. rare as a blue moon; based on the rare occurrence of a blue-tinted moon from aerosol particulates in upper atmosphere; see Superstitions." He looked out the window again. The smokestacks sent another blast up through the gray clouds.

"Brad," he said, "is your waste-emissions project putting aerosols into the upper atmosphere?"

"That's the whole idea," Brad said. "Now I don't mean to be bodacious, but that gal reporter's going to be coming up here any minute."

Ulric looked up "Superstitions." The entry for "moon, blue" read, "Once in a blue moon; folk saying attrib. SE America; local superstition linked occurrence of blue moon and unusual coincidental happenings; origin unknown."

He shut the book. "Unusual coincidental happenings," he said. "Branches breaking, people falling on people, people finding hundred dollar bills. All of those are coincidental happenings." He looked up at Brad. "You wouldn't happen to know how that saying got started, would you?"

"Bodacious? It probably was made up by some feller who was waiting on a gal and this other guy wouldn't hotfoot it out of there so's they could be alone."

Ulric opened the book again. "But if the coincidences were bad ones, they would be dangerous, wouldn't they? Somebody might get hurt."

Brad took the book out of his hands and shoved Ulric out the door. "Now git!" he said. "You're givin' me the flit-flats again."

"We've got to tell Mr. Mowen. We've got to shut it off," Ulric said, but Brad had already shut the door.

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* * *

"Hello, Janice," Charlotte said. "Still an oppressed female in a dehumanizing male-dominated job, I see."

Janice hung up the phone. "Hello, Charlotte," she said. "Is it snowing yet?"

"Yes," Charlotte said, and took off her coat. It had a red button pinned to the lapel. It read, "NOW . . . or else!" "We just heard on the radio they've closed the highway. Where's your reactionary chauvinist employer?"

"Mr. Mowen is busy," Janice said, and stood up in case she needed to flatten herself against Mr. Mowen's door to keep Charlotte out.

"I have no desire to see that last fortress of sadistic male dominance," Charlotte said. She took off her gloves and rubbed her hands together. "We practically froze on the way up. Lynn Saunders rode back up with me. Her mother isn't getting a divorce after all. Her bid for independence crumbled at the first sign of societal disapproval, I'm afraid. Lynn had a message on her terminal to call you, but she couldn't get through. She said for me to tell you she'd be over as soon as she checks in with her fiancé."

"Brad McAfee," Janice said.

"Yes," Charlotte said. She sat down in the chair opposite Janice's desk and took off her boots. "I had to listen to her sing his praises all the way from Cheyenne. Poor brainwashed victim of male oppressionist propaganda. I tried to tell her she was only playing into the hands of the entrenched male socio-sexual establishment by getting engaged, but she wouldn't listen." She stopped massaging her stockinged foot. "What do you mean, he's busy? Tell that arrogant sexist pig I'm here and I want to see him."

Janice sat back down and took the file folder with "Project Sally" in it out of her desk drawer. "Charlotte," she said, "before I do that, I was wondering if you'd give me your opinion of something."

Charlotte padded over to the desk in her stockinged feet. "Certainly," she said. "What is it?"

Sally wiped the snow off the back window with her bare hands and got in the car. She had forgotten about the side mirror. It was caked with snow. She rolled down the window and swiped at it with her hand. The snow landed in her lap. She shivered and rolled the window back up, and then sat there a minute, waiting

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for the defroster to work and blowing on her cold, wet hands. She had lost her gloves somewhere.

No air at all was coming out of the defroster. She rubbed a small space clean so she could see to pull out of the parking space and edged forward. At the last minute she saw the ghostlike form of a man through the heavy curtain of snow and stamped on the brake. The motor died. The man she had almost hit came around to the window and motioned to her to roll the window down. It was Ulric.

She rolled the window down. More snow fell in her lap. "I was afraid I'd never see you again," Ulric said.

"I . . ." Sally said, but he waved her silent with his hand.

"I haven't got much time. I'm sorry I shouted at you this morning. I thought . . . anyway, now I know that isn't true, that it was a lot of coincidences that . . . anyway I've got to go do something right now that can't wait, but I want you to wait right here for me. Will you do that?"

She nodded.

He shivered and stuck his hands in his pockets. "You'll freeze to death out here. Do you know where the housing unit by the oriental gardens is? I live on the sixth floor, apartment B. I want you to wait for me there. Will you do that? Do you have a piece of paper?"

Sally dug in her pocket and pulled out the folded scrap of paper with, "Wanted: Young woman," on it. She looked at it a minute and then handed it to Ulric. He didn't even unfold it. He scribbled some numbers on it and handed it back to her.

"This is my security code," he said. "You have to use it for the elevator. My roommate will let you into the apartment." He stopped and looked hard at her. "On second thought, you'd better wait for me in the hall. I'll be back as soon as I can." He bent and kissed her through the window. "I don't want to lose you again."

"I . . ." Sally said, but he had already disappeared into the snow. Sally rolled the window up. The windshield was covered with snow again. She put her hand up to the defroster. There was still no air coming out. She turned on the windshield wipers. Nothing happened.

Gail didn't get back to her office until after two. Reporters had hung around after the press conference asking her questions about Mr. Mowen's absence and the waste-emissions project. When she did make it back to the office, they began calling, and she didn't get started on her press conference publicity releases until nearly

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three. She almost immediately ran into a problem. Her notes mentioned particulates, and she knew Brad had said what kind, but she hadn't written it down. She couldn't let the report go without specifying which particulates or the press would jump to all kinds of alarming conclusions. She called Brad. The line was busy. She stuffed everything into a large manila envelope and started over to his apartment to ask him.

"Did you get Research yet?" Mr. Mowen said when Janice came into his office.

"No, sir," Janice said. "The line is still busy. Ulric Henry is here to see you."

Mr. Mowen pushed against his desk and stood up. The movement knocked over Sally's picture and a pencilholder full of pencils. "You might as well send him in. With my luck, he's probably found out why I hired him and is here to quit."

Janice went out, and Mr. Mowen tried to gather up the pencils that had scattered all over his desk and get them back in the pencilholder. One rolled toward the edge, and Mr. Mowen leaned over the desk to catch it. Sally's picture fell over again. When Mr. Mowen looked up, Ulric Henry was watching him. He reached for the last pencil and knocked the receiver off the phone with his elbow.

"How long has it been like this?" Ulric said.

Mr. Mowen straightened up. "It started this morning. I'm not sure I'm going to live through the day."

"That's what I was afraid of," Ulric said, and took a deep breath. "Look, Mr. Mowen, I know you hired me to be a linguist, and I probably don't have any business interfering with Research, but I think I know why all these things are happening to you."

I hired you to marry Sally and be vice-president in charge of saying what you mean, Mr. Mowen thought, and you can interfere in anything you like if you can stop the ridiculous things that have been happening to me all day.

Ulric pointed out the window. "You can't see it out there because of the snow, but the moon is blue. It's been blue ever since you turned on your waste-emissions project. 'Once in a blue moon' is an old saying used to describe rare occurrences. I think the saying may have gotten started because the number of coincidences increased every time there was a blue moon. I think it may have something to do with the particulates in the stratosphere doing something to the laws of probability. Your waste-emissions project

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is pumping particulates into the stratosphere right now. I think these coincidences are a side effect."

"I *knew* it," Mr. Mowen said. "It's Walter Hunt and the safety pin all over again. I'm going to call Research." He reached for the phone. The receiver cord caught on the edge of the desk. When he yanked it, the phone went clattering over the edge, taking the pencilholder and Sally's picture with it. "Will you call Research for me?"

"Sure," Ulric said. He punched in the number and then handed the receiver to Mr. Mowen.

Mr. Mowen thundered, "Turn off the waste-emissions project. Now. And get everyone connected with the project over here immediately." He hung up the phone and peered out the window. "Okay. They've turned it off," he said, turning back to Ulric. "Now what?"

"I don't know," Ulric said from the floor where he was picking up pencils. "I suppose as soon as the moon starts to lose its blue color, the laws of probability will go back to normal. Or maybe they'll rebalance themselves, and you'll have all good luck for a day or two." He put the pencilholder back on the desk and picked up Sally's picture.

"I hope it changes before my ex-wife gets back," Mr. Mowen said. "She's been here once already, but Janice got rid of her. I knew she was a side effect of some kind."

Ulric didn't say anything. He was looking at the picture of Sally.

"That's my daughter," Mr. Mowen said. "She's an English major."

Ulric stood the picture on the desk. It fell over, knocking the pencilholder onto the floor again. Ulric dived for the pencils.

"Never mind about the pencils," Mr. Mowen said. "I'll pick them up after the moon gets back to normal. She's home for Thanksgiving vacation. You might run into her. Her area of special study is language generation."

Ulric straightened up and cracked his head on the desk. "Language generation," he said, and walked out of the office.

Mr. Mowen went out to tell Janice to send the Research people in as soon as they got there. One of Ulric's gloves was lying on the floor next to Janice's desk. Mr. Mowen picked it up. "I hope he's right about putting a stop to these coincidences by turning off the stacks," he said. "I think this thing is catching."

Lynn called Brad as soon as Charlotte dropped her off. Maybe

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he knew why Mr. Mowen's secretary wanted to see her. The line was busy. She took off her parka, put her suitcase in the bedroom, and then tried again. It was still busy. She put her parka back on, pulled on a pair of red mittens, and started across the oriental gardens to Brad's apartment.

"Are those nincompoops from Research here?" Mr. Mowen asked Janice.

"Yes, sir. All but Brad McAfee. His line is busy."

"Well, put an override on his terminal. And send them in."

"Yes, sir," Janice said. She went back to her desk and called up a directory on her terminal. To her surprise, she got it. She wrote down Brad's code and punched in an override. The computer printed ERROR. I knew it was too good to last, Janice thought. She punched the code again. This time the computer printed OVERRIDE IN PLACE. Janice thought a minute, then decided that whatever the override was, it couldn't be more important than Mr. Mowen's. She punched the code for a priority override and typed, "Mr. Mowen wants to see you immediately." The computer immediately confirmed it.

Exhilarated by her success, Janice called Brad's number again. He answered the phone. "Mr. Mowen would like to see you immediately," she said.

"I'll be there faster than blue blazes," Brad said, and hung up.

Janice went in and told Mr. Mowen Brad McAfee was on the way. Then she herded the Research people into his office. When Mr. Mowen stood up to greet them, he didn't knock over anything, but one of the Research people managed to knock over the pencils again. Janice helped him pick them up.

When she got back to her desk she remembered that she had superseded an override on Brad's terminal. She wondered what it was. Maybe Charlotte had gone to his apartment and poisoned him and then put an override on so he couldn't call for help. It was a comforting thought somehow, but the override might be something important, and now that she had gotten him on the phone there was really no reason to leave the priority override in place. Janice sighed and typed in a cancellation. The computer immediately confirmed it.

Jill opened the door to Brad's apartment building and stood there for a minute trying to get her breath. She was supposed to have driven back to Cheyenne tonight, and she had barely made it across Chugwater. Her car had slid sideways in the street and

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gotten stuck, and she had finally left it there and come over here to see if Brad could help her put her chains on. She fished clumsily in her purse for the numbers Brad had written down for her so she could use the elevator. She should have taken her gloves off.

A young woman with no gloves on pushed open the door and headed for one of the two elevators, punched some numbers, and disappeared into the nearer elevator. The doors shut. She should have gone up with her. Jill fished some more and came up with several folded scraps of paper. She tried to unfold the first one, gave up, and balanced them all on one hand while she tried to pull her other glove off with her teeth.

The outside door opened, and a gust of snowy air blew the papers out of her hand and out the door. She dived for them, but they whirled away in the snow. The man who had opened the door was already in the other elevator. The doors slid shut. Oh, for heaven's sake.

She looked around for a phone so she could call Brad and tell him she was stranded down here. There was one on the far wall. The first elevator was on its way down, between four and three. The second one was on six. She walked over to the phone, took both her gloves off and jammed them in her coat pocket, and picked up the phone.

A young woman in a parka and red mittens came in the front door, but she didn't go over to the elevators. She stood in the middle of the lobby brushing snow off her coat. Jill rummaged through her purse for a quarter. There was no change in her wallet, but she thought there might be a couple of dimes in the bottom of her purse. The second elevator's doors slid open, and the mittened woman hurried in.

She found a quarter in the bottom of her purse and dialed Brad. The line was busy. The first elevator was on six now. The second one was down in the parking garage. She dialed Brad's number again.

The second elevator's doors slid open. "Wait!" she said, and dropped the phone. The receiver hit her purse and knocked its contents all over the floor. The outside door opened again, and snow whirled in. "Push the hold button," said the middle-aged woman who had just come in from outside. She had a red "NOW . . . or else!" button pinned to her coat, and she was clutching a folder to her chest. She knelt down and picked up a comb, two pencils, and Jill's checkbook.

"Thank you," she said gratefully.

"We sisters have to stick together," the woman said grimly. She

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stood up and handed the things to Jill. They got into the elevator. The woman with the mittens was holding the door. There was another young woman inside, wearing a sweater and blue moon boots.

"Six please," Jill said breathlessly, trying to jam everything back into her purse. "Thanks for waiting. I'm just not all together today." The doors started to close.

"Wait!" a voice said, and a young woman in a suit and high heels, with a large manila envelope under her arm, squeezed in just as the door shut. "Six please," she said. "The wind chill factor out there has to be twenty below. I don't know where my head was to try to come over and see Brad in weather like this."

"Brad?" the young woman in the red mittens said.

"Brad?" Jill said.

"Brad?" the young woman in the blue moon boots said.

"Brad McAfee," the woman with the "NOW . . . or else!" button said grimly.

"Yes," the young woman in high heels said, surprised. "Do you all know him? He's my fiancé."

Sally punched in her security code, stepped in the elevator, and pushed the button for the sixth floor. "Ulric, I want to explain what happened this morning," she said as soon as the door closed. She had practiced her speech all the way over to Ulric's housing unit. It had taken her forever to get here. The windshield wipers were frozen and two cars had slid sideways in the snow and created a traffic jam. She had had to park the car and trudge through the snow across the oriental gardens, but she still hadn't thought of what to say.

"My name is Sally Mowen, and I don't generate language." That was out of the question. She couldn't tell him who she was. The minute he heard she was the boss's daughter, he would stop listening.

"I speak English, but I read your note, and it said you wanted someone who could generate language." No good. He would ask, "What note?" and she would haul it out of her pocket, and he would say, "Where did you find this?" and she would have to explain what she was doing up in the tree. She might also have to explain how she knew he was Ulric Henry and what she was doing with his file and his picture, and he would never believe it was all a coincidence.

Number six blinked on, and the door of the elevator opened. "I can't," Sally thought, and pushed the lobby button. Halfway

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down she decided to say what she should have said in the first place. She pushed six again.

"Ulric, I love you," she recited. "Ulric, I love you." Six blinked. The door opened. "Ulric," she said. He was standing in front of the elevator, glaring at her.

"Aren't you going to say something?" he said. "Like 'I withspeak myself?' That's a nice example of Germanic compounding. But of course you know that. Language generation is your area of special study, isn't that right, Sally?"

"Ulric," Sally said. She took a step forward and put her hand on the elevator door so it wouldn't close.

"You were home for Thanksgiving vacation and you were afraid you'd get out of practice, is that it? So you thought you'd jump out of a tree on the company linguist just to keep your hand in."

"If you'd shut up a minute, I'd explain," Sally said.

"No, that's not right," Ulric said. "It should be 'quiet up' or maybe 'mouth-close you.' More compounding."

"Why did I ever think I could talk to you?" Sally said. "Why did I ever waste my time trying to generate language for you?"

"For me?" Ulric said. "Why in the hell did you think I wanted you to generate language?"

"Because . . . oh, forget it," Sally said. She punched the lobby button. The door started to shut. Ulric stuck his hand in the closing doors and then snatched them free and pressed the hold button. Nothing happened. He jammed in four numbers and pressed the hold button again. It gave an odd click and began beeping, but the doors opened again.

"Damn it," Ulric said. "Now you've made me punch in Brad's security code, and I've set off his stupid override."

"That's right," Sally said, jamming her hands in her pockets. "Blame everything on me. I suppose I'm the one who left that note in the tree saying you wanted somebody who could generate language?"

The beeping stopped. "What note?" Ulric said, and let go of the hold button.

Sally pulled her hand out of her pocket to press the lobby button again. A piece of paper fell out of her pocket. Ulric stepped inside as the doors started to close and picked up the piece of paper. After a minute, he said, "Look, I think I can explain how all this happened."

"You'd better make it snappy," Sally said. "I'm getting out when we get to the lobby."

* * *

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As soon as Janice hung up the phone Brad grabbed his coat. He had a good idea of what Old Man Mowen wanted him for. After Ulric had left, Brad had gotten a call from *Time*. They'd talkified for over half an hour about a photographer and a four-page layout on the waste-emissions project. He figured they'd call Old Man Mowen and tell him about the article, too, and sure enough, his terminal had started beeping an override before he even hung up. It stopped as he turned toward the terminal, and the screen went blank, and then it started beeping again, double-quick, and sure enough, it was his pappy-in-law to be. Before he could even begin reading the message, Janice called. He told her he'd be there faster than blue blazes, grabbed his coat, and started out the door.

One of the elevators was on six and just starting down. The other one was on five and coming up. He punched his security code in and put his arm in the sleeve of his overcoat. The lining tore, and his arm went down inside it. He wrestled it free and tried to pull the lining back up to where it belonged. It tore some more.

"Well, dadfetch it!" he said loudly. The elevator door opened. Brad got in, still trying to get his arm in the sleeve. The door closed behind him.

The panel in the door started beeping. That meant an override. Maybe Mowen was trying to call him back. He pushed the DOOR OPEN button, but nothing happened. The elevator started down. "Dagnab it all," he said.

"Hi, Brad," Lynn said. He turned around.

"You look a mite wadgetty," Sue said. "Doesn't he, Jill?"

"Right peaked," Jill said.

"Maybe he's got the flit-flats," Gail said.

Charlotte didn't say anything. She clutched the file folder to her chest and growled. Overhead, the lights flickered, and the elevator ground to a halt.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Mowen Chemical today announced temporary finalization of its pyrolitic stratospheric waste-emissions program pending implementation of an environmental impact verification process. Lynn Saunders, director of the project, indicated that facilities will be temporarily deactivated during reorientation of predictive assessment criteria. In an unrelated communication, P.B. Mowen, president of Mowen Chemical, announced the upcoming nuptials of his daughter Sally Mowen and Ulric Henry, vice-president in charge of language effectiveness documentation. ●

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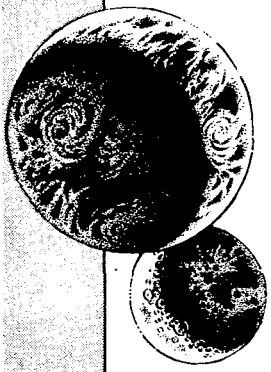
DON'T DRINK THE SKY AT MYRMIDON

In this long northern night
of a lopsided planet
near the galactic core,
the heavens never cease
their dense mandalic whirl,
double suns tease and clot
the horizon in candescent rays.

don't kiss the sky at Myrmidon
it is both lover and cannibal

In the holy square at Landefrye
on securdays and royal feasts,
on any day along the market stalls,
the blind seers chant tales
of those brilliant coruscations
which have stripped their vision
clean as a master's slate.

don't drink the sky at Myrmidon
they say its fury burns the brain



And still the pilgrims trek
cross half a continent,
past Labrek, the frozen marshes,
the whistling pass at Byrne,
to stand with open eyes
as the colors of night descend,
heads thrown back against the high.

don't touch the sky at Myrmidon
don't drink the sky at Myrmidon
don't kiss the sky at Myrmidon
don't!

—Bruce Boston

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(from page 29)

SOLUTION TO RIDDLES OF THE SPHINXES

Figure 2 shows how the rep-tiles divide.

For almost a year Matsu tried to construct a pentagonal (five-

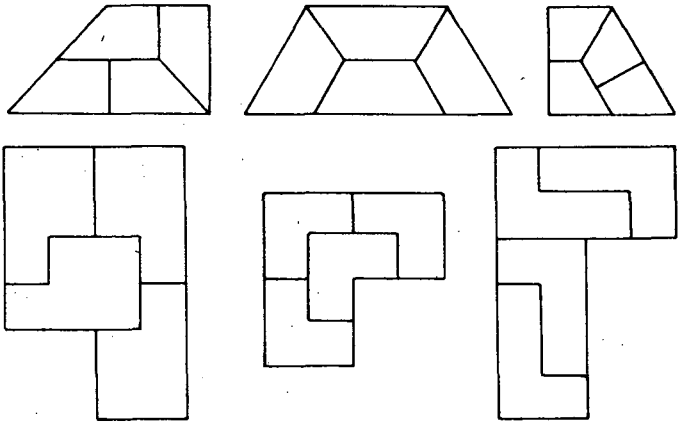

Figure 2

sided) rep-tile, but without success. Then one day his associate Dr. Beatrice Mince, who had moved from Philadelphia to Tokyo to study Matsu's revolutionary techniques, managed to create the pentagonal rep-tile shown in Figure 3.

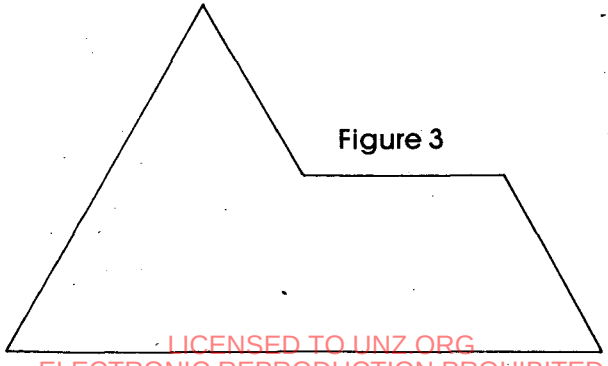

Figure 3

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"Beautiful! Beautiful!," exclaimed Matsu, as he and Mince watched the highly magnified image of the organism wander about on the microscope's display screen. "What shall we call it?"

"How about *sphinx*?" said Mince. "It has a shape that looks like a profile of the ancient Egyptian statue that once stood near the Great Pyramid."

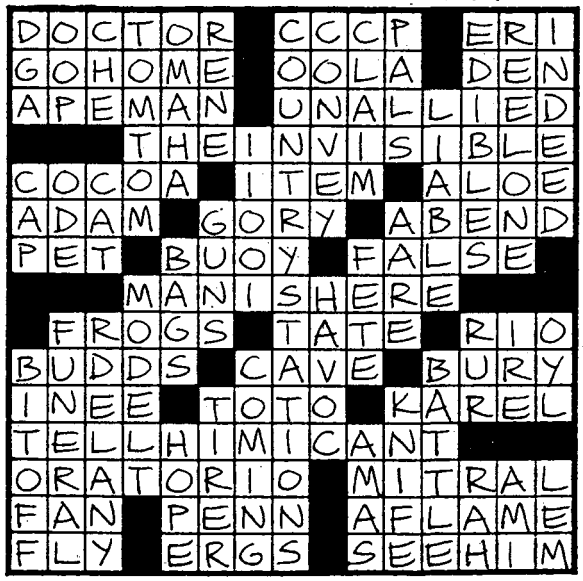
"Ah, so," said Matsu. "You are right. What a pity the Sphinx was destroyed in the great Middle-East war of 2019."

Let's see if you can divide this inscrutable rep-tile into four smaller and identical sphinxes before you turn to page 137.

IAsfm Puzzle #18

From page 23

SOLUTION TO SIGHT GAG



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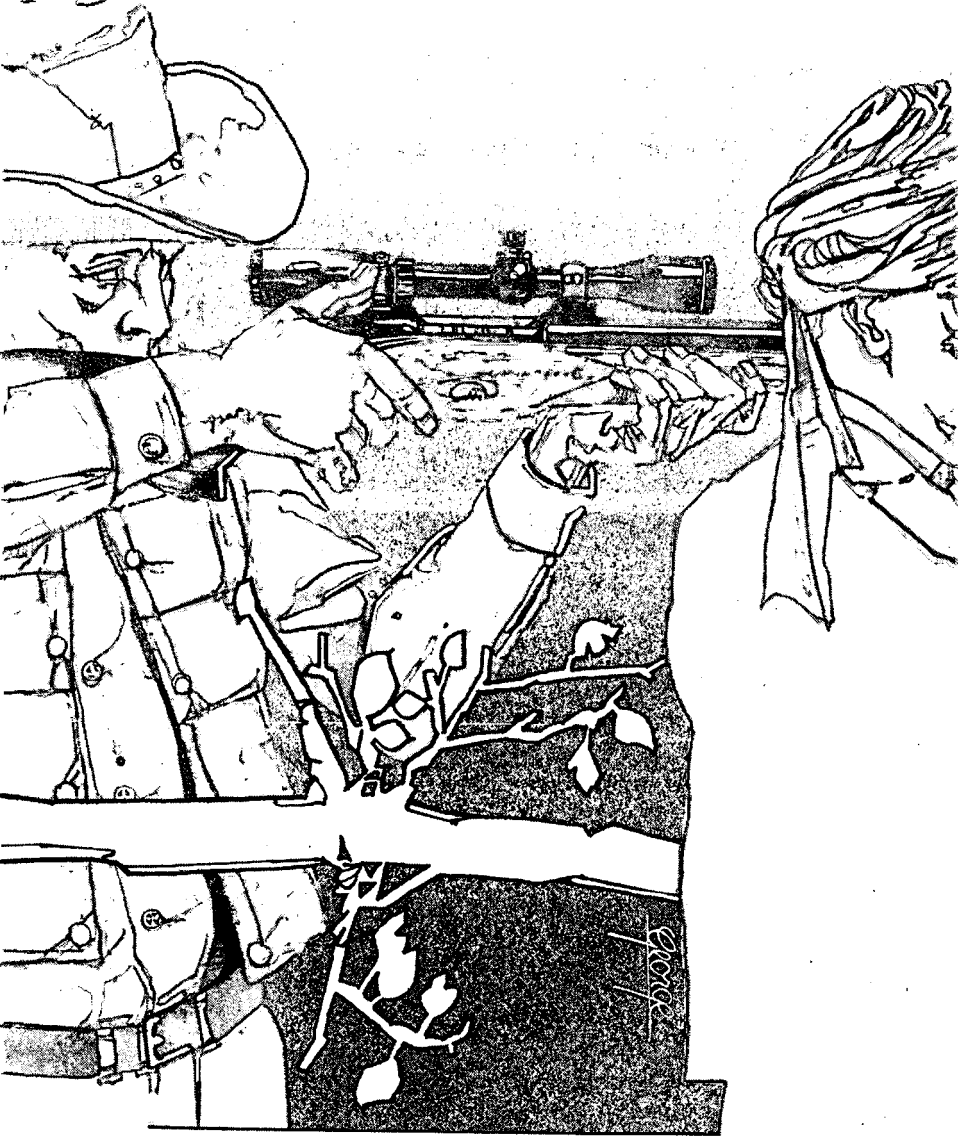

BRIGHT BURNING TIGE

by Tanith Lee

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Since her last appearance
in these pages, Ms. Lee reports
that she has begun work
on "a novel to do with the French revolution
in forward parallel time."
The story which follows will appear
in a collection from DAW Books
called *Indian Nights*, due out
sometime next year.

art: Arthur George

R

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Long, long ago in London a girl of my acquaintance, finding her ginger feline asleep by the gas fire, struck a pose, one foot lightly on the cat's back, announcing: "Shot it in Injuh, y'know," and she had so perfectly caught, in voice and stance, the pompous waking dream of the British raj, that it became a game often repeated, only ended at last by the intolerance of the cat to playing tiger's skin. As for me, the joke summed up a basic personal attitude. I had then an allergic indifference to a type of man and his pursuits, as unlike myself and mine as those of an alien species. Later, when I learned more of the facts, some of the glibness of the joke had to be rethought. There are occasionally among tigers maneaters, which can prey on the remoter villages of the jungle-forest, cruel, maddened things that seem to hate, killing from lust rather than hunger, leaving the half-devoured bodies of women among the stalks of the fields at sunrise; by night a nightmare shadow, so a man will be afraid to go out of his hut to make water in case death has him. There is sometimes a *need* for a bullet, which the sneer and the attitude had formerly cloaked. Much later again, when I met Pettersun, I came to understand, unwillingly at first, maybe always unwillingly, something of what drives the hunter, something actually of the uncanny bond which can come to obtain between one who hunts, one who is hunted. Certainly to perceive the slender division which exists, always interchangeable. For the man may misfire, the weapon stall, the beaters run away, and the dark come down which is the tiger's country, the land of night. And in the forests of the night, the golden beast with his nocturnal sight, the unalloyed weapons of his mouth, the blades of his feet, his great strength—the creature capable of eating men—that is no mean adversary. It isn't in me to enter, to want to enter, the magic circle of any of this. Not merely that I lack the courage, though I do lack it, but because I could never kill anything either ritually or callously that I absolutely did not have to. And luckily, I never have had to kill anything, beast or man. For this reason, perhaps, I can tell my story, safe by a sort of mitigating accident. I wonder.

It was just outside the Victoria Memorial in Calcutta that I met the fat man. Part of my living comes from carrying out paid research for others, and my mind was still idling somewhere between here and the Jadu Ghar, my feet already turning towards the hotel. Softening the slums and palaces, an orange sun bled low over the Maidan. The fat man blocked the view, halting before me on the steps and introducing himself. I can't recall who he

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said he was, but he knew me from an article that had carried my photograph. I was thinking with annoyance he would now engage me in argument over something I had written and forgotten, when he told me Pettersun was dead.

"How?" I was shocked by aptness, not surprise, and the query was half rhetorical. It was fairly obvious what must have occurred, nor was I mistaken.

"A tiger killed him. Funny business. Damn funny. I've given myself the responsibility, you might say, to let people know, people who knew him."

"I never knew him well."

"Didn't you? That's all right then. But still, a funny business." I looked at the blankness of his dark silhouette with the amber sunset crackling around the fat edges of it. He wanted to say some more. "Funny," he said.

"You mean amusing, or peculiar?"

"Oh, not amusing. Not at all. Peculiar. Yes, that's it."

"Why?" I said.

"Well, he wasn't off hunting it, you know. He was in bed."

"In—*bed*—"

"Exactly. And the thing came in, right into the bungalow, and tore him in pieces. Pretty horrible, I gather. Yes, pretty damn horrible."

It certainly sounded odd. Monkeys, rats, snakes, these come into houses, not tigers that I ever heard of. The fat man stood, gloating over his own dismay, mine. I was compelled to go on, ask questions.

"Where did this happen?"

"North," he said, and named a small town. "About ten miles from there. A couple of villages. One of the old rangers' bungalows. He was living there, out in the jungle. Just drinking a lot, not doing anything. Then there was a scare apparently, a maneater. They'd heard about Pettersun and came and asked him if he'd take it on, and Pettersun said, No, he was through with all that. But he started cleaning his gun—you remember that gun of his, with ivory—"

"Yes, I remember."

"Then there's a panic, you know how they are. The tiger's everywhere. In the village, in the other village. Up a tree, in the fields, down the well—He was going out the next night, or that's how I heard it, torches and beaters, the whole bloody show. A little before dawn he was lying there with the gin bottle for company

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and—whap! One of his beaters found him and ran out screaming. It was mucky."

"How do you know all this?"

"Doctor at Chadhur was called in to look at the body. I know Hari pretty well. Second-hand news, but reliable."

"It sounds unbelievable."

The fat man didn't take offense. He shrugged.

"It does, doesn't it? But the Bombay papers had it, you know, a paragraph or two."

"How long ago was all this?"

"A couple of months. Well, that's life. I could do with something cool."

The dim wild cry of sunset worship was beginning to rise from distant mosques. I excused myself to the fat man and went away to get a drink alone.

I digested Pettersun's death slowly in the shadow of the turning fans, like huge insects in the ceiling. How else must a hunter die, but logically under the hoof or claw or fang of the entity he has so long himself stood over, his foot on its neck, the rifle smoking. Shot it in India. Though he had not been one for tiger-skin rugs.

I hadn't, as I said, known him well. I hadn't liked him, God forbid, or admired him, except possibly for his bravery, for there had been stories I had heard of that from other sources. I suppose to some extent he fascinated me, the forbidden fruit of what our own ethic tells us is wrong, which to another is only an ordinary facet of existence. I'd met him at a sprawling English party in Bombay, full of men in penguin costume and women in gold lamé dresses, all of them brown as tanned leather, which made the coffee flesh of the waiters look almost blue. We spoke generally for a while, part of a group, which gradually drifted away, leaving Pettersun alone with me. He then said, smiling, as if he'd been waiting the chance, "You don't like me much, do you." No question, no aggression; a statement. I said nothing. He swirled the last of his drink, drank it and said, "Or rather, you don't like what I do. Orion the Hunter. The wicked man who kills the nice animals."

I shrugged, considering the neatest way of escaping, which hadn't yet suggested itself. One of the waiters came by with more drinks, and Pettersun took off four, the fourth of which he handed to me.

"Thanks," I said.

"Yes," he said. He drank the first of his new drinks straight down, and said, "Call me names, if you like. I don't shoot men."

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"Just tigers," I said, before I could stop myself.

"Just tigers? A tiger is never *just* tiger."

"For sport," I said.

"No," he said. Still the smile, throwing me, enjoying it? "I'd never call it that."

This was becoming boring and uncomfortable.

"Well," I said, helpfully, "a maneater obviously—"

"So you won't stand up for your principles," he said, and drank the second drink. "You think I'm an offense on God's green earth, but you're not about to tell me so."

"Mr. Pettersun," I said, "what you do is your problem."

"Afraid I'll hit you if you speak up, break the chisled nose, is that it? I won't. I'm a peaceable man. I like booze, preferably free. I kill tigers. Note, I didn't say I *liked* killing them. That's it. The sum of my parts."

"Excuse me," I said. As I turned, he put the third glass into my other hand, which duly stayed me, because he had obviously wanted it himself. "Have a drink?" he said.

I stood there with a glass in either hand, looking at him, wondering.

"What do you want?" I said.

"I think," he said, "I want to talk to you, tell you—about the very thing you don't want to hear about."

"In other words, you want to be a nuisance."

"No."

"Convert me? Not a chance."

"Well, of course not," Pettersun said. "There's no pleasure in conversion. And debate is normally pointless, isn't it?" I stayed where I was, caught despite myself because he had said something I myself believed. "So, what can it be?"

I started to drink the drink he had given me. I said: "Drunken egomania needing to find a voice?"

He laughed. "This affair stinks," he said. "I know a place on the waterfront where a girl dances with cobras on all the tables. You like that kind of thing?"

"Yes, I sometimes like that kind of thing."

In the "place," where the barefoot girl did her dance every two hours, swishing her black hair like a horse's tail, the milked snakes knotted on her arms, at her waist, we drank something alcoholic curdled in *lassi*. I wasn't even then sure what had made me go there with him. It would be easy enough, with hindsight, to say I sensed he needed to confess; last rites before execution. As someone I once knew said, there is something of the priest

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about me, somehow, somewhere, apparent both to myself and, under particular circumstances, to others.

The preliminary conversation rambled; I don't recollect much of it, but when he began to *talk* to me, as he had said he wished to, there came a kind of clarity which I do remember and maybe always shall. No sentences are left, but I retain their kernel. For this was when the free-masonry of the hunt was made known to me, and I was just drunk enough that it came in over or under the barriers of my mind and ethics, and I understood, and I still understand, though I won't condone. Condone it less, probably, since I saw the attraction, the religious element, the extraordinary bonding that might occur (at least in the human's mind), which must then be sought after like a drug. While it was some bloody old duffer with his rifle and his notions of sport it stayed safely and obscenely remote. But the sorcerous quality of the ritual of the hunt, arcane and special, and there, I suspect, in many of us, had a seductive frisson that had to be resisted—which in fact made it all the more repulsive—the venus fly-trap.

I recall too, well into the night, staggering back along by the sea-shore, the black water and the towering ghosts of apartment building, and the moon like ivory, like the ivory inlay on the rifle, of which he carried a snap-shot, just as other men carry photos of their women or their children, or lacking those, their dogs.

In the morning, waking with a hangover, I thought it has been a waste of time, ridiculous. But very soon the teachings—for he had taught me his philosophy, under the wild fig tree of the dancing-girl's shade—came back. Hunter and hunted, the stalker and the prey, woven by reeds, by leaves, by shadows, by blood-thirst and fear, and by desire. And which was which? Then getting up to put my head in the luke-warm basin-full of water, I thought angily: Rubbish. A man with a gun. What chance had the wretched tiger? Who did Pettersun think he was fooling? But he hadn't been trying to fool me. He had only been saying, This is how it is, for some, for me. Right or wrong. This. I had never had much patience with Hemingway, but I re-read *The Old Man and the Sea* a week later, in the blazing Indian verandah. The relationship between the fisherman and the great beautiful hooked fish—aside from necessity, thick-headed, wanton, unaware—anything its detractors will prove it—but powerfully illustrative, in its way, of the mystique Pettersun had revealed to me. But if it is possible to murder with honor and love and pity, then all the more reason to stop.

I never met Pettersun again. A few months later, the fat man

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met me instead on the Memorial steps in Calcutta and said, "A tiger killed him. Funny business."

So, then. Just over twelve months later, doing this time some research on my own behalf, I ended up more or less randomly in Chadhur.

Once I had my own professional affairs in hand, I went over to the hospital building. Here I loitered, pondering if I really wanted or intended to chase the matter. But someone asked me, as they do Europeans, who I was looking for. I replied with the name of the doctor the fat man had called familiarly, "Hari."

Graceful and gregarious, Doctor Hari invited me into his office for very good coffee, and I broached my subject tentatively. The response was not tentative at all. Doctor Hari had had for Pettersun all the rage of the good physician for the intransigent patient. "If the tiger had not done for him, his alcoholism would have seen to it. His system was in revolt. On the path he had chosen he had a year or less."

"But it's true, then. I heard the animal got into—"

"—The bungalow and attacked him in bed? Quite true. Do you have a strong stomach?"

Pettersun had been disembowelled, the heart and throat torn out—the rest of the corpse had been bitten, rent, virtually slit like a sack. "It was quite a mess. The villagers are used to death and mishap, but they were terribly afraid and superstitious. I too have seen a number of men killed by tigers or panthers. Never a body exactly in this condition, and all uneaten."

"Then it wasn't the tiger he was out to get?"

"Well, perhaps. The second village trapped a tiger about ten days after—an old tiger turned to man-flesh, as they sometimes do, because men are easier game. I should say this tiger was not strong enough to have done to the body what had been done. Naturally, sometimes they will kill and not eat, but then not maul so savagely, splitting open, almost a dissection. While the room was untouched."

"How did it get in?"

"The door was open. He had left it open—wide, like an invitation one might almost say. Very strange. Very unpleasant. And sad. There are other villages in the area with cause to be grateful to Pettersun."

I had a dead feeling, the let-down of anticlimax. I didn't know what I had expected to hear. Then, as I was leaving, Doctor Hari said, "Of course, the drinking had made him do curious things.

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On the wall of the bungalow, for example, he had written something in big letters. A poem of some sort, some modern English or American verse, unrhyming. About a tiger, naturally. The villagers still refuse to go near the house at night."

To go out to the bungalow was the next thing to do, so I put off doing it. Pettersun's death was stale a year now, and nothing to me or to do with me. My interest did not seem purely ghoulish, but probably was. Against that, I knew I couldn't leave without following events to their proper conclusion. Finally I got a car and took to the new highway, which bore me all the way to the town of the fat man's tale. From there the wisest course was horseback, colonial style, along the dusty road and into the blistered, streaked, striped heart of the jungle. Here I almost gave myself entirely to the spirit of place, the intense enclosure of the massive trees skirted with broad leaves and thickets of bamboo. A few times women passed me on the track, walking what I call the sari-walk, wound in their jewel bright garments, basket or pot on head. They were lean and proud and sometimes beautiful beyond measure. Presently I saw a village, downhill in a valley, where the jungle broke and scattered. Grain stood straight up at the sky, children ran about, a herd of buffalo wallowed in summer mud.

The sky had turned briefly to a wall of glowing maroon beyond the trees, when I reached the bungalow—and nearly missed it. The jungle, as in Kipling, had been let in, vines and high grass all over everything, barely the glint of dirty-white verandah posts to show me. There was a cookhouse round at the back and a couple of huts, but these also were overgrown; the roofs had fallen in.

I stirred about for a while, the horse cropping the grass, unconcerned. The doors to the house had been boarded up by authority, and I had no intention of forcing them in the dark. There seemed nothing dangerous abroad, but as the night smoked through the forest, I remounted and made my way back to the village. Here I was greeted with curiosity amounting to joy. I didn't mention my errand or that I had been to the bungalow, merely did a little trading over the rice and spiced vegetables. Later a child of five appeared, who spoke to the men in Hindi of his wife and family, the family cow and goat, the ailment of his youngest daughter. It was the memory of a recent past life. Such things are not uncommon in India. The child's mother presently came in and comforted him, telling him all would be well. He would soon forget prior responsibilities, as this life and its obli-

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gations claimed him. When the child had been taken off, I mentioned tigers, and at once a deep silence fell. The men looked at one another. Eventually someone told me, "There are no tigers here. They have gone away."

"But surely," I said, "someone was attacked by a tiger in these parts, about a year ago . . . quite a well-known hunter—Porter, Potter—some name like that."

"Yes," said another gravely. "That tiger was killed. There are no more."

I looked at their gaunt, passionless faces, so handsome, some of them, enduring all. Outside, across the space of night-time earth, the forlorn child, burdened by obligations he could no longer uphold, slept on his mother's breast. They had shared food with me and would shelter me, and I could force no more of my own wants on them. I didn't sleep that night behind their safe stockade, lying listening to the rustle of leaves and stars. At first light I left, walking the horse through endless-seeming ranks of goats being arranged for milking, and girls walking to the well.

Up in the jungle-heart the bungalow had not altered, still locked up in its boards and creepers. Leaving the tethered horse I forced one of the windows, and climbed through into what had been Pettersun's sleeping room. The low Indian bed, its lacquer peeling and webbing broken, still stood dutifully at one wall, the rotted netting hanging down about it like cobwebs. Some shelves, a desk, a chair, these things remained, but no niceties, if there had ever been any. There was no idiosyncratic odor in the room. Becoming one with the invading jungle it had the jungle smell, tinders and juices. Lianas had come through the foundations even, and covered the floor, so that any stains there were hidden.

The verse Doctor Hari had told me of was on the wall facing the bed, written in paint with long letters that leaned in all directions. It was dark enough that I had trouble making any of it out. When I did, an unnerving pang of recognition went through me, still displaced. Pettersun had written this:

Symmetry fearful thy frame could
Eye? Or Hand Immortal—What?
Night—the; of forests. The in—
Bright burning Tiger! Tiger!

I stood there, breathing audibly, startled, hearing the birds and the monkeys calling through the jungle, silently reading the words over, until suddenly, of course, that *Tiger! Tiger!* gave me the key. It was nothing else but Blake's poem, but all bizarrely reversed, the last line first, the second to last second, second line

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third, first line last. And each word in each line also reversed, first word last, last first, and so on. Gibberish. No surprise Hari had thought it some avant garde piece coined in Greenwich Village. The punctuation, too, was scarcely Blake's.

"Madman," I said aloud, jolted to an abrupt disgust and compassion neither of which had I thought to feel so forcibly, if at all. "Poor bloody drunken murdering madman." And, having spoken, I read the nonsense on the wall also aloud, to the quiet box of bungalow held in noisy jungle.

Something clicked in my brain as I did so. I stumbled mentally after it. Elusive, it was gone. In some preposterous manner, the lunatic reversal of the fragment of poem—made sense. As if, blindfold, one touched a cat's fur in darkness, not knowing, yet instinct to say: Ah, but *this* is—before the acceptable name came or light to disclose.

Then, letting in the jungle, something else was let in. Standing there with a shaft of olive green sunlight on the vine-carpet, I visualized the tawny shadow of death-by-night shouldering through the opened doorway. Every hair stood up on my body and my loins were cold and empty with horror. It was imperative to escape. I fled through the window, tearing skin and clothing, pursued by demons of the mind. Pettersun's mind.

When I had calmed down, I got on the horse and rode in the direction of the other village the fat man, and Doctor Hari, had informed me of.

The simple explanation of what happened next is that I misjudged my road, got off the track, blundered about and made things worse for myself, ending up the proverbial panic-stricken lost traveler of song and story. I suppose that is what happened, though generally I rarely lose my way, or if I do I regain it fairly quickly. Not so in this instance. The track all at once dissolved, and carefully retracing my way for some distance, or trying to, I failed to rediscover it. Various formations of trees, angles of illumination, which I had noted and which might have provided guidance, seemed mysteriously changed, though the greenish jungle sun streamed through and the shadows massed and the monkeys screamed to each other, all as they had been doing minutes before. If anything, something was at fault in my own perception.

I fell into the pit of compounding my error by then defiantly pressing on. I was sure I would soon pick up the path again, discover a fresh one, or merely ride through a break in the foliage and so into the village, by a sort of serendipity. None of these things happened. In the end sheer heat and exhaustion forced me

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to halt, dismount in the shade, and drink water. Here I very foolishly went to sleep for almost an hour, an idiotic thing to do. As a rule, the beasts of the forest do not attack sleeping creatures, but Pettersun had probably been asleep when so attacked—what price faith? Besides, snakes haunt the wilderness, and sometimes itinerant human beings, the worst predators of all.

When I woke, irritated by everything, mostly myself, I had given up on my quest. The second village was plainly enchanted, and had vanished. Using the compass, and occasionally aided by glimpses of afternoon sun marking the west, I turned back towards the first village which was real. Although I had been floundering for some while and my bearings were hopelessly out, that group of huts and persons, and the reincarnated child, lay directly over to the east, and the tracks which led to and from the place were good. I had no doubts I should get there well before sunset.

Hours later, bathed in sweat, the horse shambling, the hollows bowing into shadow and the glimpsed sky throwing hot bars against the trees, I began to be dully afraid. It seemed I had now lost my clue to anywhere. The jungle had me, bound me in its veils and towering stems. There was no way back, no way out. I stopped then, and tried not to lose my nerve too. It was difficult.

The red flame died and the grayness came in a rush, and in another rush the black of night. I sat the horse, as the sounds of day receded and the choruses of the frogs grew loud, mocking me, for this black fearful interior was home to them. And to others.

The *Ramayana*, which speaks of the roaring of wild animals, the tangled walks, the fatigue and privation of this landscape of trees, says the forest is the realm of wind, darkness, hunger and great terrors.

There was nothing now to be done till morning. I had water and some crumbs to make my magnificent evening *khana*. I possessed no weapon, save the means of starting fire, which I would arrange at once. My sleep I had had. I would watch tonight.

I kept my vigil well. Maybe tiredness came to assist me, for I passed swiftly into that benzedrine state where sleep seems superficial anyway, an invention of time-wasters. Slight fear was here, too, a constant. Slight fear like a condiment sprinkled on the enormous lulling beauty of the night. Not that I could see very much, beyond the sharp gold splashings of my fire. The beauty was in the blackness, and only the blackness lay out there, fold on fold of it, vision coming solely through the ears. Everywhere was the steady burring of frogs and nocturnal insects,

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which frequently fell death-still, as it does, not for any sinister reason, at least no reason that might be sinister for me. A couple of times, too, came the pandemonic uproar of monkeys disturbed, bursting adrenaline through my bloodstream, after each of which alarums I relapsed, smiling a little. The forests, "realm of terrors," are essentially and potentially dangerous, but there will seldom be actual violence. The venomous serpent, dropping on the neck like coiled rope from the ceiling of boughs, the big cat, famished and rearing from the bushes, these are the stuff of the book and film industry.

Periodically I looked at my watch, pleased at the timelessness I had achieved, where minutes passed like hours, and where two hours could go in what seemed only minutes. That sacerdotalism I've mentioned perhaps lay behind the sense I had of the peace of contemplation the *sadhu* pursues to such spots. For yes, here you might feel the depth and shallowness of created things, their oneness, the bottomless, endless, blissful nothing that is everything, and which contains the vibrating root of the soul. I was delighted also that I had avoided the cliché of supposing I had been brought there by fate. The idea of silly accident sustained me. At length, I could say it would be dawn in scarcely more than an hour, and with the new day I should find my way wherever I wished.

I had no thought of Pettersun, who inadvertently had caused me to be where now I was. He seemed far off from my contemplations. As if I were forgetting him.

The light came when the dawn remained most of an hour away. This was not sunrise.

It was separated light, like that of my own fire. I formed the opinion at once, with mingled hope and distrust, that mankind had arrived with torches, and whether friend or foe I had no means of telling. I sat on with my spine to the tree, my hearth before me, trying to make out figures round the alien glare.

Presently my uneasiness increased. I had realized whoever carried the torches was playing some sort of puzzling game. First of all, they did not approach, but seemed to be circling me to the left, the flame flashing on and off as stands of fern or trunks interposed. Secondly, unless small children or midgets were concerned, whoever flourished the brands must be crawling on their knees.

My blood was undiluted adrenaline by now, and rising, I moved away from my fire as quietly as I could, taking up a position against a neighboring tree. My anticipation was of robbers, even

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some revival of the stranglers of Kali Ma. My horse, tethered nearby, was snorting and prancing in the undergrowth. Perhaps the answer would be to slash the tether with the knife I had picked up and now defensively cradled, leap on the horse's back and make a wild dash through the pitch-black jungle. But such a headlong course was precarious and I was not sure I preferred it. Bluff, lies, and a gift of rupees might be handier.

I had reached this partial decision when something else struck me about the circling, low-down blaze of torchlight. And now I was rather stunned, completely disinclined to attempt or plan escape because everything seemed inappropriate, faced by the fact that, though the light stayed all together—some thirteen or fourteen feet of it—it reflected on nothing, lit up nothing, could not therefore be *light* at all.

Just then the vegetable strands of the darkness parted, and the lightless light flamed through.

I remember I said, "Oh God," quietly, as if I were expected to. That was all. It was pointless to say or do anything.

There is a kind of terror that is no longer truly terror, but some type of refined and developed emotion that terror has bred—a sort of ecstasy in which fear, actually, has no part, nor the will to resist which fear usually supplies. I had heard it once or twice described. Now I felt it.

I could make excuses at this juncture, or alternately could pile the expletives up to mountain height and let off fire-works from the top—both methods resorted to out of nervousness. Because what I must put down now will, of course, not be believed. I didn't imagine it, or dream it. I do believe in it myself, but only because I saw it.

What had appeared in front of me was a tiger; it was Pettersun's tiger, and I choose that possessive with care. It had a tiger's shape, and a tiger's aura, from the canine swagger of the hind-quarters found always in the greater felines, to the sculpted, almost toy-like, modeling of the head. The blazon of the tiger it had too; it was the color of apricots laced with zebra stripes, as if the scars of a beating had been inlaid with jet. It stood longer and higher than any tiger I had seen or heard of; if it came closer, as undoubtedly it would, its head might nearly level with my own. But freaks occur in nature, men or beasts mightier, larger, than their fellows. The light was inexplicable. For the tiger, Pettersun's tiger, burned bright, bright as the fire I had mistaken it for, and on this conflagration which shed no gleam to either side, or any-

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where, the black stripes seemed like the bars of a furnace, holding the power of it barely contained.

The eyes were also fire, or apertures into the fire which composed it, not green as the lenses of cats become by night, but golden like the rest. The eyes saw me, perhaps not my flesh, but piercing like an X-ray through to my bones. In my ecstasy of terror I understood this much: I was no prey to it. To kill me would be incidental—how it had killed Pettersun—death a by-product of the thing it was. And yet, this was not so, not the truth—even in that extremity I knew I had made a mistake and if I died, would die without the extreme unction of an answer. And then the tiger moved. It moved like a forest fire, plunging in a straight igniting line, right at me. My heart stopped. Started again as the gush of gold veered and crossed my path. At the last, its eyes avoided mine, uninterested, its dog's ears were pricked, listening, but not to me, the trembling of my body and my mind. The unstrung bow of its tail brushed through the grasses that should have exploded into arson, that only dipped aside, falling over to lave my hands with coolest dew, not sparks.

When I looked again, the forests were stirring; a subtle penciling in of forms hinted at the dawn; all other fires were out.

I put down the beginning of Blake's poem, though so well known, to facilitate this final act, as one sets out each stage meticulously, when solving a mathematical problem. It runs:

Tyger! Tyger! Burning bright,
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

When the scald of morning lifted the black rind off the jungle, I started to walk, leading the horse, due east. If I had needed proof, which I did not, that something out of the ordinary had touched the vicinity, the horse would have furnished it. Sweating, shivering, and skittish, trying to kick at me, frothing, rolling its eyes—this was what my docile mount of yesterday had become. I led it with the utmost difficulty. It was clearly not afraid of anything that lay ahead, only unhinged; my own state, relegated to the primal.

After about fifteen minutes, I came into the clearing where a hint of dirty whiteness—a verandah rail and posts—announced the bungalow. This was how near I had been to it all night. I don't think the knowledge would have enhanced my pleasure. To find it now merely added a suitable footnote to what had gone before.

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I skirted the building with pedantic caution. I wanted no part of it, and once it was behind me, the urge to bolt was almost irresistible. Somehow I controlled it, just as, somehow, I controlled the horse. When we reached the village, we were welcomed with courtesy and without comment. No doubt, the wound of the supernatural was raw for all to see, but I was not theirs, and they did not try to pry or comfort me.

A week later, when I had got back to Chadhur, I hung about in the hotel, waiting for myself to go off the boil like a kettle removed from the scene of the heat. My nerves were jarred in such a way that I could not put my finger on what the disorder was, or how it should be cured. I had accepted that I had brushed with things occult, but they had done me no physical harm. Reasonably elastic and rational as it generally was, my intellect would surely learn to cope with this; already I had perspective. Time would resolve the rest. Yet so far, time had only made me worse. It was nothing so mundane as loss of appetite or sleep. I slept perhaps rather more readily than was my wont. And if my dreams were hectic, they were not about tigers, rather about a multitude of unimportant stupid items, that waking one would dismiss—a fly in the room, a dull, unidentified noise, trying to recall the name of someone never met. Awake, I ate and took healthy exercise, was no longer jittery; sudden sounds did not bring me to my feet with a wail. No, it was nothing I could lay my hands on, pick up and examine and so be done with. And yet it was as if my balance on the tightrope of life were gone. I could do all I should, could even be relaxed about it. Yet I knew I had fallen and somehow was suspended in mid-air.

After two days, I walked across to the hospital and located Doctor Hari's office and good coffee. He knew, without being informed, where I had been, and said nothing of it, only remarking as he poured the second cup, "You look a little not yourself. Can I do anything for you?"

"Only if you have a prescription for psychic whip-lash."

"Ah ha! The phantom tiger of the forests."

I was not amazed he'd heard of it. I had come to believe that gaudy beast of golden fire was often sighted, and word passed on to credible and sceptic alike.

"Yes," I said. "And there really is one."

"Well," he said. "And why not?"

"You haven't said, 'Did you see it?' Does that mean you've seen it yourself?" He only smiled. I thought perhaps he had not. I said,

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"What you can do for me, if you would, is ask your resident scholar if he'd consider letting me have a translation of this."

Hari accepted the sheet of paper mildly. The "resident scholar," his pet patient, was convalescing in an unusual condition of hermitage.

"I realize I'm being a damn nuisance," I said. "But I would be very grateful, and naturally I'd compensate him for his time in whatever way he felt was suitable."

"I am not hesitating for that. Your Hindi is fine, and I know from what you have written that you can read the language perfectly well."

"In this case, though, shall I say I need a second opinion?"

Hari glanced at the brief array of words. He may have recognised my own script, or some essence of text. He raised one long curved eyebrow, a dramatic gesture I respected, grinned and told me he would do what he could. Next evening, as the flying-foxes stormed the moon, he found me on the hotel roof and gave me the translation, its price an iced coconut juice. The scholar, it seemed, refused all payment.

I didn't read the translation then. I waited until I was alone, and then I waited until the hotel was noiseless, and the streets noiseless, and then until the streets and the hotel began to sound again with dawn. Then I chid myself, and opened the paper and read it through and put it away, and took it out again and read it again, and sat a long while as the window flooded with light, hearing goats and coughing cars, and bicycles and bullock carts, and the relentless drumming of my own heart, as my balance came back to me.

When I had said it aloud, that writing on the wall of Pettersun's bungalow, the phonetics had stolen in on me, and after gestation, offered themselves. They were basic enough; to replace 'eye' with that which resembles it: 'I.' And in the vernacular that employs the word 'thy' to guess that maybe the word 'the' might become the word 'thee'. And primed by that, I had written out the back-to-front verse again, with its alterations, thus: *Symmetry fearful thy frame could I? Or Hand Immortal—What? Night—thee; of forests. Thee in—Bright burning Tiger! Tiger!* And again, a fraction closer, that *click* of intuitive knowledge—cat's fur touched blindfolded—yet not enough. And then I hit upon the obvious. I translated the bizarre sentences, as they stood, flatly into Hindi, and gave them to a bi-lingual scholar for free and profound translation back into our native tongue, Blake's, mine, and Pettersun's. And so I received my answer. It wasn't, I think, an invocation.

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Although Pettersun knew, he did *not* know. Although he wanted, he had no notion of wanting. Or at least of what the wanting was and how it might be satisfied. It had to tear him in pieces to get out, that monstrous and fantastical birth—the beast within, the glittering core of what he had tried to possess through pursuing, to become through destroying, the alter image, the bond, the magic circle, hunter and hunted—the place where the margin wears so thin that one may become the other. To the villages perhaps, it is the transmigration principle. He died and returned to pay *Karma* as a tiger. But no, he is the tiger's child, as surely as he gave birth to it—to *himself*. The Id foresaw, if Pettersun did not. The Id always foresees. And that was why, stumbling through the medium of Blake, knowing no other, he wrote on his wall what the kindly Brahman translated for me, this prayer to the infinite Possibility:

Flawless and fearful One, could I assume thy form?
Or, Immortal moving Fate, what is my portion?
Thou art Night, thou art the forests' night. Thou art within—
Bright burning Tiger! Tiger! ●

NEXT ISSUE

The February issue of *IAsfm* will feature a new George and Azazel story, "A Matter of Principle," by Isaac Asimov. Our cover story, "What Seen but the Wolf," is by Gregg Keizer, and you'll also find a new Ben Hardy, Time Detective novelette by Warren Salomon. Don't miss these and our other great stories and columns. Pick up your copy, on sale January 17.

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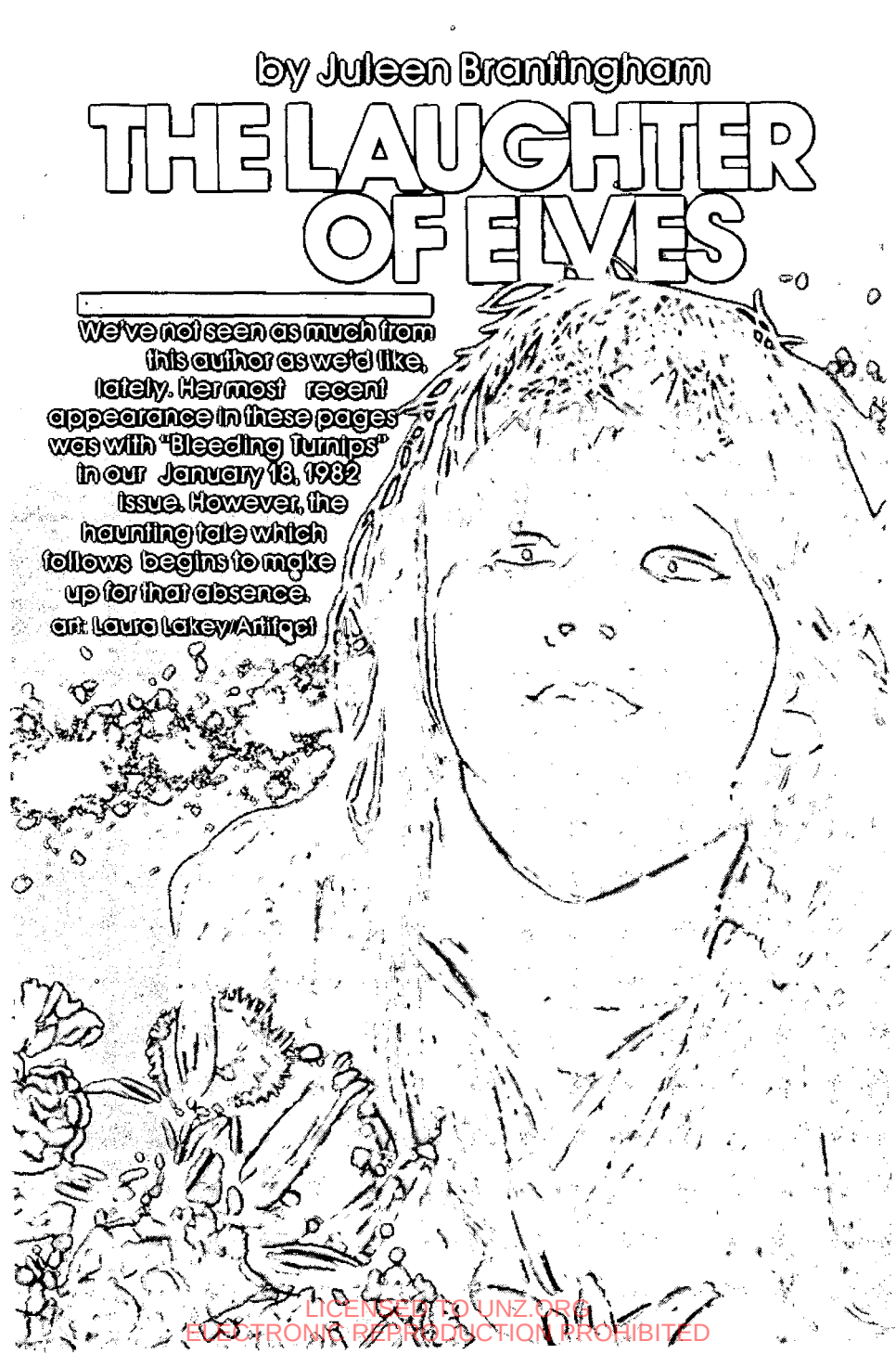
by Juleen Brantingham

THE LAUGHTER OF ELVES

We've not seen as much from this author as we'd like, lately. Her most recent appearance in these pages was with "Bleeding Turnips" in our January 18, 1982 issue. However, the haunting tale which follows begins to make up for that absence.

art: Laura Lakey/Artifact



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There is something strange about children of a certain age: a kind of light that glows from the skin, an air of grace, the memory of a scent. They are the silence that is almost sound after the laughter has died away, after the door has closed, after the mourners have expressed their sorrow. Their beauty stabs the heart with knives of ice.

There is . . . an attraction. I can feel it myself, so I can almost understand that man—though not what he did—wanted to do. Not ever that. But to be near her, yes. To glimpse another world through her eyes, to be touched without touching. To wonder.

The moonlight through the open window gilded her face as she slept. I stood in the doorway as I had done ten times a night, every night for two weeks. Holding my breath. Watching for something I had never seen. Waiting . . .

I don't understand. No one can give me answers, not answers that make any sense. All I have are images: that place, the man, the blood. And Tracy naked, not a spot of blood on her, too bewildered to be frightened.

Can't anyone tell me why?

I close her door with a sound as soft as a sigh and steal back to my bed, careful not to disturb the man who shares it with me. But I think my eyes will never close.

I wait.

It is late afternoon and Tracy is on the front porch playing with her dolls and her trucks. The sun filtering through the trees strikes sparks of gold in her hair and turns her skin a pale, delicate green. She speaks to her dolls, sings snatches of a song, and surely her words are English but the heavy summer air turns them into something my ears strain to make sense of.

I watch from the living room, hidden by the drapes. I'd been warned not to hover, not to make her fearful with my own imaginings and guilt but how could I stop?

By the calendar my daughter is four years and five months old but she gets upset if I say four or even four and a half. She is, she insists, four-going-on-five. I am thirty-going-on-ninety.

There is more traffic on the street now, the cars moving at cautious speeds through this neighborhood of children. When our gold Chevette turned the corner I hurried to the kitchen, to the clutter of meal preparations I'd abandoned when Tracy left her swing set outside the kitchen window to go out front and watch for Daddy.

I heard the murmur of their voices and a burst of laughter

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scalloped by a silvery giggle. The screen door banged and footsteps galloped down the hall. He burst into the kitchen with Tracy in his arms. Two identical pairs of hazel eyes sparkled. Two mouths smiled and kissed me. Tracy must do everything just like Daddy.

My knot of fear loosened slightly. Changing of the guard.

"Time enough to change before supper?"

"Of course. Make sure Tracy washes. Check her fingernails."

When they leave the kitchen is emptier than it was before. But the house is alive again. I am. Waiting is the death I have passed through one more time.

Chairs scrape across the floor. Silverware clinks. Around and through these sounds are the threads of conversation that tie us together, the glances that say more than words.

"So who *is* your new manager?"

"—and he's nine, Daddy."

"Nobody," Jack says, laughing. "The whole department was—"

"He's got a big dog and a two-wheeler—"

"Eat your peas, Tracy."

"—dropped right off the reorganization chart and—"

"—and cowboy boots. Oh!" Tracy was struck by a thought so startling it made her drop her fork. I smiled as I picked it up and wiped it off for her. With Tracy "struck by a thought" is a literal expression. Everything stops, her eyes get wide, and her face lights up.

"Daddy!" She tugged at his arm to be sure she had his full attention. "Daddy, he can even cross *streets* by himself!"

Jack looked at me and we laughed, silently, on the parental channel. "Imagine that!" he said.

"Why can't I do that? I'm as big as he is and he can do it. Why can't I?"

"You know why, chick. There are safety rules about crossing streets and you don't always remember them."

"I do mostly."

"*Mostly* isn't good enough. You have to remember all the time."

Tracy's stubbornness crept out with her lower lip. Some of the light died out of Jack's eyes. He was never very good at this part of parenting.

"I think I missed something. Who is this Wonder Boy with the dog and the two-wheeler and the cowboy boots?"

"Boots," Tracy repeated impatiently.

"The new boy in the neighborhood," Jack explained. "I understand his nickname is Boots. Didn't you meet him?"

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I shook my head. "I haven't heard anything about a new family moving in. When did you meet him, Tracy?"

"Today. He came and played with me on my swing set."

"Tracy, you played alone today." Such a little thing, but suddenly I was afraid again. Sometime I don't understand my daughter, the things she says, and I know—I'm almost sure that if I could just unravel those things I could stop being afraid. But Tracy—

"I was *not* alone! Boots was here! He pushed me on the swing and he showed me how to go down the slide on my tummy and he told me about his dog and his house and—"

"All right, settle down now," Jack said, putting his hand on her arm. "No yelling at the table. I guess Boots was here while your mother was busy and she didn't see him, okay? Now eat your baby cabbages."

She looked at him, then down at her plate. "Daddy, these aren't baby cabbages. They're peas."

"Are you sure?" Jack picked one up and examined it. "They look just like baby cabbages only with skins all over so you can't see the leaves. I thought maybe your mother went to the dolls' grocery store by mistake and—"

Tracy giggled. "Mommy couldn't go in the dolls' grocery store. She's too big. She'd smash it all apart and then the dolls wouldn't have anything to eat."

She hadn't been out of my sight more than thirty seconds all day.

"Jack, there was no boy here today. Nobody new has moved into the neighborhood since the Schillers came, six months ago."

We were on the back steps enjoying the breeze and the sunset. Tracy was on the swing set at the far side of the yard. She could see us and probably she could hear our voices but I was certain she couldn't make out what I was saying.

He shrugged, reached for his beer. "Maybe it happened yesterday. You know she gets the days mixed up sometimes."

"Yesterday morning she played with Melissa and Randy. After lunch it looked like rain so I made her stay inside. She watched TV."

"That's it, then. She saw someone on TV, a boy with a dog and a two-wheeler and she liked him so she pretends that he's real and came to see her."

"No." I'd been in the room every minute. I watched what she watched. There was no boy named Boots, no visitors yesterday

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or the day before, no one new in the neighborhood. Tracy wasn't mixed up. She was lying.

Jack shrugged.

The chains on the swing made a harsh cricket sound that slowed and died away. I looked and found her staring at me. The light was so dim she might have been looking at both of us but I knew she wasn't. Tracy knew all my secrets.

Jack and the doctor had warned me. I couldn't tell him why I was so sure. She knew that, too.

I shivered.

She was warm from her bath. The color in her face made her look more real than the frail green child I'd watched this afternoon. I popped the nightgown over her head, patted her on the behind, and turned her over to her father, waiting at the bathroom door.

He swung her up, making her giggle.

"What will it be tonight, Princess? Elves or buried treasure or magic wishes? Or maybe you'd like me to tell you why the Easter Bunny has nine pockets in his vest."

"Wishes, Daddy! Tell me a story about magic wishes. Wishing makes things come true, doesn't it, Daddy?"

"That's right, chick. If you wish for something hard enough—"

"Jack!" My voice was so loud it startled even me. "The new storybook I bought is on her bedside table," I managed more quietly. "Why don't you read that tonight?"

Downstairs it was cool. The only light in the living room was from the waxing moon shining through the front windows. I walked through the house, locking doors, pulling shades, and turning on lights. I don't like moonlight. It hides things instead of revealing them. The shadows outside . . .

A touch on my arm made me jump.

"What are you looking at?"

"Nothing." I let the drape fall. "I thought I saw someone. Did she like the book?"

He groaned. "Love of my life, I adore you. But you have no taste when it comes to choosing storybooks."

"It's about animals. Tracy loves animal stories."

"It was written by a *zoologist*," he said, scorn wrapped around every syllable. He was at the bookcase, looking through the odd-sized books on the top shelf.

"Who could write a better book about animals?"

"A poet. Where's that photo album Mom sent?"

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"Right next to your hand. If it was a snake it would bite you. What do you want it for? I burned all the pictures of your old girlfriends."

"Very funny. My mother didn't know her darling boy even *had* girlfriends until I took you home to meet her. Ever see this before?"

He handed me a snapshot of a gnome with ancient eyes, almost lost in a shirt and booties made to fit a bigger baby. "That's the picture your father took the day they brought you home from the hospital. You were a preemie, weren't you?"

He nodded, pointing to the booties that came half-way up the legs of the baby in the picture.

"Boots," I said.

"Yeah, that's what everyone called me up until the time I started school. I'd almost forgotten."

"You must have mentioned it to Tracy."

"Must have," he shrugged. "So there's your mystery boy. Kind of flattering, really. She liked the name so when she invented this imaginary playmate—"

I made a sound. He glared at me, lips thinned with irritation.

"Look, it's *normal*. I had one myself."

"It was different for you. Living out on that farm you never even saw another child until you started school. Tracy doesn't have to invent a friend. This neighborhood is full of kids."

"Then why did she do it? If she did. You're the one who claims this boy doesn't exist."

I just looked at him.

"No." He turned his back and walked away. "No."

"That doctor we took her to, he said she's not even sure yet what happened. He said the problems would show up later."

"*No,* dammit! He said *if* there were problems they would show up later. He also said that *if* we handle it right she can forget it ever happened."

"I don't *want* her to forget it happened. The details, yes." The blood. So much blood. Why . . . "But not that it happened. I want to teach her—"

"To be afraid."

"No! I want to teach her to be careful. There are other people like that old man."

We glared at each other, a couple of hissing cats. Pretending. He was always making up games and telling her stories. He made her believe that nothing bad could happen to good little girls, that

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the world was made of laughter and parties and happily ever after.

I couldn't stay mad at him. The anger was wiped out in the rush of memories. That ugly room in a burned-out house by the tracks—the blood—his mutilated body—and Tracy looking up at me with the eyes of an angel in the middle of hell.

I was there. I saw it. I knew how close we had come to losing her forever. Tracy and I had memories that all Jack's pretending couldn't erase.

How had it happened? Why? He took her away, coaxed her into that room and then. . . . changed his mind. A fit of remorse, one of the cops told me. Maybe a multiple personality, one side a pervert, another believing sins must be punished.

If thy right eye offend thee . . .

No. I couldn't accept that. And they'd never found the knife.

I hadn't screamed when I found her there and carried her away in sheer blind panic. I wouldn't scream now. But I began to shake from the effort of holding it back. Once I started I was afraid I could never stop.

Jack's arms were around me, his breath in my hair.

"It'll be all right," he whispered. "We had a bad scare but it turned out okay. It will always be okay as long as we have each other."

Tracy wishes on stars. But it was very good to have his arms around me.

The nightfears are the worst. I never had them before. Just the normal maternal fears about speeding cars and rabid animals and pneumonia. The nightfears are different. Like the way moonlight changes the neighborhood, turns it into an alien landscape filled with unknown dangers, the nightfears are familiar things that have become shadowy and strange.

Her hair was fanned out on the pillow and her hands clutched the sheet up under her chin. I had meant only to look at her from the doorway but I found myself kneeling by the bed, studying her face as if I must memorize it. Or as if I had never seen it before.

She looked so delicate, just a sketch of a child, a few lines. Under her eyelids I could see her eyes moving, moving, never still.

What are you dreaming, baby? What beautiful world do you see? Or is it an ugly one, a nightmare world? I would follow you if I could. I would protect you . . .

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Some expression flickered briefly on her face. In daylight I would have called it a smile. But shadows and moonlight—

I pulled back from her, shuddering. A child shouldn't smile that way.

The nightfears are the worst.

"Tracy, there's no house at the end of Lucas Street. I've driven past that corner a hundred times."

She hugged Raggedy Ann and refused to look at me. "They just builded it. Boots told me."

"There's nothing there but trees."

"That's why you can't see it. The trees hide it. Boots likes it that way."

"*Boots* likes it. I suppose his parents have nothing to say about it." Sarcasm is wasted on a child. Why did I bother?

"He doesn't have a mommy and daddy. He lives by himself."

Wishful thinking, maybe. Tracy might like to live alone, or at least without a mother who was always making her do things she didn't want to do, asking questions she didn't want to answer.

Twice this morning I'd looked up to find she wasn't playing where she was supposed to be. Twice I'd run outside in a panic and found her half-way down the block, going to see Boots.

Lock her in her room? She was my child, not my prisoner.

"Put your doll down. Come with me."

She looked up, instantly wary. That hurt added fire to the anger I was trying not to show, trying not to feel.

"Where are we going?"

"To see Boots." To prove there's no house on that corner. To make you admit there's no little boy who comes to see you when I'm not looking.

"He said he might go see his grandma today."

"Then we'll just take a look at his house."

"Maybe we can't find it. There's lots of trees."

It was three blocks to the end of Lucas Street, a long walk for short legs in the summer heat. The first block she dragged her feet, whined, and made excuses. The second block she walked carefully, not stepping on any cracks. She skipped down the third block, stopped to say hello to a toad in the gutter, and asked if we were having ice cream for supper.

I wasn't angry any more. I only wanted to get this over with. We turned the last corner and walked into the shade of the trees.

"Now, where is it?"

"Where is what, Mommy?"

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"Boot's house. You said it was here, at the end of the street."

She pulled her hand out of mine and sat down to poke a finger through a hole in the toe of her sneaker. "Maybe he said it was the other end."

"Tracy, stop telling stories. There is no house here. There's no little boy. Now tell the truth. You made it all up, didn't you?"

There was a sound, a bird call, I was almost certain. Tracy turned to look, her eyes wide. "Boots!" she cried. She scrambled to her feet and ran away from me.

It was a rotten, miserable afternoon. One minute I felt like a wicked step-mother, the next like a martyred saint. Tracy was in her room, sobbing pitifully for a while, then storming around making crashing noises that I was too wise to investigate. Silence didn't come to the house until almost five o'clock. I tiptoed up the stairs and eased the door open, expecting to find that she'd nodded off.

She was in her rocking chair, sucking her thumb. She hadn't done that for over a year. She looked up at me with tear-reddened eyes. Then she was in my arms and both of us were crying.

"I'm sorry I spanked you so hard. You scared me, baby."

"I'm sorry, too, Mommy. Boots wanted to—"

"Don't. Please. Let's not talk about Boots."

It couldn't have been more than ten minutes that I spent chasing Tracy around that wooded lot but at the time I thought I was caught in a neverending nightmare. There couldn't have been many hiding places but she'd flickered in and out of my sight as if she could turn invisible at will. I would hear a giggle from behind a bush and then, impossibly, from the opposite direction. The woods had seemed to be filled with hidden children, their laughter, their footsteps.

She curled up in my arms, her forehead resting on my neck, one hand stroking my cheek. Tracy is not a cuddly child. Except when one of us has gone too far.

"Would you like to go out to the porch and watch for Daddy? He should be home soon."

She was slipping out of my arms before I'd finished the question. She was cheerful again, her wounds healed. I listened to her footsteps on the stairs and waited for the stretcher-bearers to come and carry me off the field. I'm too old to heal that quickly.

Jack was on the porch with her for almost ten minutes. I won-

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dered if she would tell him about our troubles this afternoon. Probably not, I decided. Tracy almost never stops to look back.

He came into the kitchen alone and sniffed at the pan simmering on the back burner. "Wow! Homemade vegetable soup. I don't know how you manage it on a day like today."

"Yes, idiot. Just like Mother used to make. Straight out of the can. How was your day?" The other words were on the tip of my tongue but I held them back. Of course she was still on the porch. I didn't need another lecture on the dangers of hovering over her.

"What was Tracy bending your ear about?"

He laughed as he picked up the mail and sorted through it. "Didn't she tell you? She wants a dog, just like Boots's. Next it'll be a two-wheeler."

Boots again. I'd hoped we'd put that ghost to rest.

When I was little my father used to take me fishing. I never caught anything because I kept pulling the line out of the water to see if the worm was still on the hook. Where *was* she? There wasn't a sound from the front porch. A rat was chewing holes in my stomach.

He looked up. "You know, a dog might not be such a bad idea at that. It would be company for her and we certainly have enough room here. What do you think?"

What was he talking about? I felt split in two. Of *course* she was on the porch. Where else would she be this close to supper time? Why couldn't I hear the rattle of her trucks or the creak of floorboards?

"I don't know," I said distractedly. "Dogs are a lot of trouble."

He made an impatient sound. "You mean housebreaking and training and all that. Jeeze, why do you always think of the problems whenever I suggest something? Can't you ever look on the good side?"

"The good side?" I was setting the table, my hands shaking so badly the silverware rattled. Where was Tracy? "Why can't you ever look at the practical side?" My voice was sharper than I wanted it to be. Where was Tracy? "Dogs get sick. They dig holes and chew things—" This was wrong. I didn't want another argument. But where was Tracy? "—and bite people and—" *Where was Tracy?*

His annoyance was changing to concern. "Lynne—"

I shook my head, took a breath. "I'm sorry. Please, can we talk about it another time? I had a really bad day."

"Of course we can."

He was so gracious. So generous. I had to grit my teeth.

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"It was just an idea. Maybe after you've had time to think about it." He picked up the mail again, his concern forgotten.

Damn him. What was this? A test? Was he trying to find out how long I could go without running out to check on her? He stood there flipping through a magazine as if he didn't have a care in the world. As if he didn't have a daughter. Had he forgotten her? It was more than ten minutes since he'd come inside. Dammit, she'd run off three times already—

"Will you call Tracy, please? Tell her to wash her hands."

He looked at me but his eyes said he was somewhere else. "What? Oh, I guess we'd better start without her. She wanted to go see someone and I said she could for a few minutes." He turned back to the magazine—

—and left me falling apart. I couldn't catch my breath to get the words out normally.

"You. Let. Her. Go . . . alone."

"For Pete's sake. She's just down the block."

It seemed to be happening in slow motion. To someone else. I could almost see it: my face twisting into a grotesque mask, my shoulders bowed, my hands curling into claws. *He* was doing this to me. I hated him. Couldn't he feel anything? There was a scream locked inside me, but the only sound I could force from my throat was a whisper, like ashes.

"It's over for you, isn't it? You didn't see her there in the middle of that horror. You don't have questions . . . fears. It's all Disneyland and fairy tales—wishing makes it so—isn't that right?" I hated him. Hated. I wanted to hurt him as much as his unconcern hurt me, but how could I when I couldn't even reach him? She was his daughter, too. Why wasn't he afraid?

He was moving toward me, his hand out, his mouth shaping words I couldn't hear.

I twisted away. "Don't touch me!" I screamed. "Don't you ever touch me again! I *hate* you!"

Shattering silence, crystalline mocking laughter—ending. Inside my head . . . Inside . . . far away . . .

He looked bewildered. His eyes were just like Tracy's eyes that day when my world began to fall apart. I had never turned away from him before. No matter what was wrong, no matter what hurt us or disappointed us, we had always taken comfort from each other. We were strong together. But not ever again. The strength and the love had been an illusion, one of his pretty dreams.

Not ever again. He couldn't take me in his arms and wish away this pain.

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"You don't *know* she's all right. I *need* to know, Jack. I need to know every *minute*. I need to *see* her."

A small, scared voice from the doorway said, "Mommy, I'm here."

I opened my eyes in silent darkness. But it hadn't been silence that wakened me. I reached for memory and found no trace of nightmare, only—laughter.

There it was again. Faint but clear, like distant bells.

I almost fell getting up from the sofa for I'd forgotten that was where I had chosen to sleep. Jack hadn't even tried to talk me out of it when I brought a sheet and pillow downstairs. All evening he'd watched me out of the corner of his eye as if I'd come down with a sudden disfiguring illness and he didn't want me to catch him rudely staring.

Laughter again. The faint patter of footsteps.

I went to the window and pulled back the drape. The moon illuminated nothing. Deep shadows moved and breathed and threatened. I began to shiver, though the night was almost as hot as the day had been. There was a smell in the heavy air, a scent as strange as moonlight.

No. I let the drape fall, backed away from the window. The danger was not out there. It was here. I felt the eyes watching me. I turned.

They stood at the foot of the stairs, holding hands. Two frail and beautiful children with faintly glowing skin.

"Tracy—"

But she wasn't Tracy. Not my child. Never mine.

And the other one. With hazel eyes and solemn mouth.

They stared at me for a timeless time. Then they laughed and ran away. Across the floor and . . . away. Where I could never follow. They ran into the night and the strangeness and my feet were too heavy to follow for I was of the earth and they were not.

Their laughter floated back to haunt me. The laughter of terrible things that had never been human.

I sat at the foot of the stairs until the sun's light touched me and still I could not move, could not force myself to walk up those steps.

I couldn't bear to see what they'd left behind. ●

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Art: Arthur George

MARS NEEDS BEATNIKS

by George Alec Effinger

The author began writing SF in 1970, and since then has turned out about a dozen novels and four short story collections. His most recent novel was *The Wolves of Memory*. He says that he has been called "The Tommy Tresh of science fiction," but we're not sure what that means, or if we should even be printing it.

Here is the story as promised and like virtually on time, I expect my check immediately or I will have my mother call you EVERY HOUR ON THE HOUR until you capitulate. I will accept no repeat *no* editing as my writing is diamond-pure heartbeat true inner beatific vision stuff. If you mess with it you mess with the pulse of the universe and like the Lords of Karma will see to it that your old lady catches something in the back seat of a new Edsel and not only that but when you get home from work tonight all your Lester Lanin records will have scratches like right in the most fabulous places. It has been a pleasure doing business with you.

MARS: THE SQUARE PLANET

(And don't put some new headline on this like "Little Green Men Dig That Earth Jive." We—Norman and me—won't stand for it, and we'll make you look like nowhere the next time those people from *Life* interview us.)

(And I want my byline at least as big as whoever does those very not-with-it predictions for you. Speaking of which, the Mar-

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tians gave us a few and you can use them if you want. Like in the next five years there will be over a *hundred square feet* [italics mine] of knotty pine rec room paneling for every man, woman, and child in the country. Weird, no? You wouldn't dare print that. Nobody will pay attention. Rumors about movie stars they believe no matter how crazy, but a genuine Martian prophet earns nothing but scorn and derision. How typical. How square. I ask myself why I'm doing this and it isn't just the princely sum of money you will be sending IMMEDIATELY because, you dig, the diamond-pure prose is reward enough. It makes the *Saturday Review* squirm in print and like it's good for them.)

The visions began sometime in June, 1959.

We were called to New Orleans. They call that city The Big Easy, and it is. We came because New Orleans, like St. Louis and Chicago, is the birthplace of jazz, and jazz is the birthplace of us. Yet somehow there was something weird happening. We arrived at different times, not knowing the others were coming too, but we joined together in a magical congregation of far-out hipness.

I have wept for two days. I have worked to tell this story, and for two entire days it has beaten me. It is a big story, a fearless and holy story, and a story about the cool Zen American dream in its absolute most pure and incandescent state. The story is about jazz, poetry, Mars, dreams, freight cars, air that smells like spice, and the best minds of our generation. When I begin the story with the jazz, I'm afraid you'll like give up before the rainbow portals come into it. When I begin with the ancient dead sea bottoms, I know you'll get wigged by the great tenor saxophone of Sonny Rollins. It has been a problem of organization, you dig, a matter of putting all the seemingly unrelated pieces together. I can do that easy, no sweat; just tell me, where do I start?

I came to New Orleans first, and I took a place on the patio of the Café du Monde, where you eat hot beignets covered with powdered sugar and drink coffee with chicory and stare across the square at the old cathedral. You like pretend you're not in America at all, but in some quaint European cathedral town where they like imported palm trees and banana plants during the night when you weren't looking. The breeze is warm and humid, and the coffee-brown river is only a short distance on the other side of the railroad tracks, and you can hear the calliope music from the steamboats. That was my place.

It wasn't until Allen arrived that the visions began. He had the first one, and he told me about it. He had come down from New

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York, from the sanctified ruins near Tompkins Square and he wandered around New Orleans looking for his place, delighted by the groovy street names which hold so much magic: Bourbon Street, Basin Street, Rampart Street. He ran into a jazz funeral for some old Negro, some ancient worshipful trumpet player who was being put to rest by his brothers—"sending him off," they call it—and Allen joined the procession, thinking "Yes! Yes!" that he was accepted and no one told him to split that Negro funeral scene. The musicians were mournfully swinging through the hot brick streets, sliding out some scat version of "Just A Closer Walk With Thee," but on the way back Allen flipped when the band broke into a frantic and happy "Rampart Street Parade" and followed that with "When The Saints." It was like a moving street party with laughing and dancing and people waving umbrellas and just purely swinging. No grief here, man, we done send him off. The funeral worked its way back to the starting place and then, like a New Orleans summer shower, evaporated, fell apart and disappeared, and all the Negro musicians and the Negro preacher and the Negro family members and the Negro second-liners following and dancing and clapping, they all went away somewhere, leaving Allen alone and lost on some narrow street of beat cottages and shuttered doors. Allen grinned; this was his place.

His vision came after dark, in a small, dim, smoky spot on Toulouse around the corner from Bourbon Street. Paintings like cool jazz hung on the walls in the red light, and bullfight posters, and scenes of exotic places like Frisco, and pictures of kids with big sad eyes and puppies, and notices for poetry readings and rallies. Candles burned on chianti bottles. Chicks in black toreador pants, black turtleneck sweaters, their hair cut short or pulled back in ponytails, eyes closed, listened to the cat on stage blow. Allen grabbed a chair and leaned back against the grimy wall and closed his eyes. No one bugged him. No one demanded that he order something or get out. Relaxed, at peace, centered, Allen had the first vision.

He was somewhere else. He was like *somewhere else*. The sun was too small in the sky and the sky was too blue. Red sand whispered over the barren ground toward the hills as dark as twilight. The air smelled sharp and peppery; he could almost taste it. There was a light sound, music maybe or just his soul singing. He was lost but like it didn't make any difference because he was with-it. He tried to pick up on where he was but there weren't any roads or signs or anything. He started walking toward the

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hills and after a while he came to a canal. He knelt and drank because he was thirsty, and the water fizzed and tasted sweet and like cool. A gentle wind soothed him. He saw a strange boat far away on the canal, a boat with a sail made of spiderwebs, a delicate green fluted boat that glided nearer, and as it came nearer it like whispered real gone poetry to him, blowing so true that Allen dug it: this was no place on Earth. This was that weird planet so many flipped-out chicks claim they come from.

When the slight ghost of a boat came to where Allen was standing, a cooled-out voice spoke to him. Allen woke up startled, in this jazz joint. On the narrow stage some square creep was pretending he knew one end of his ax from the other. He was playing the kind of stuff you'd expect from some guy working a gig at Nathan's Coney Island, you dig? Allen was completely drugg but he remembered the vision.

Jack and Neal arrived the same day, touched base at the corner of St. Claude and Elysian Fields like kids in a playground game, and then immediately split town again in a freight car that was taking them to someplace like Memphis or Port Arthur. When they got there they jumped out and found a ride and came back to New Orleans again. They had their vision huddled in the back of the watermelon shed in the French Market, with the old Negro men sitting around them talking softly and laughing. Jack and Neal saw the twin moons rising over the dusky hills, and a brittle white city of fragile towers and rainbow portals where the canal turned westward toward the weary sun. Urgent voices husky with love led them across the warm sand, and they stopped to eat fruit the color of copper pennies and sweet as morning. The voices murmured and Jack and Neal said like nothing, there was nothing to say and nothing to do but follow. They came to the hills but they did not know how to go on. They awoke, and the old men were still telling stories as ancient as themselves, and the watermelons were piled higher than a man's head, and Jack and Neal shivered when they remembered what they had lost.

Lawrence split his bookstore in San Francisco and came to New Orleans and had his vision leaning against a whitewashed tomb in St. Louis Cemetery #2. He awoke cold and frightened and like desperate for what he had glimpsed.

Denise arrived in New Orleans and sat at the foot of the levee and watched the pushboats shoving barges against the Mississippi, and dreamed of great sandships crossing the rust deserts of another world. She dug the voices and the music bit, she tasted the wind and the sweet fruit, and she awoke to find a cat blowing

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a Dixieland horn and a kid tap-dancing for nickels.

William knew New Orleans and had been in New Orleans and had lived there, so when he arrived like he wasn't too surprised until he had a vision of golden roses and silver tears, of stones that murmured and clouds that brought sadness instead of rain. He awoke to find a New Orleans that swung different than it ever had before.

And Norman came to New Orleans too, because everybody else was cutting out for there and because he was frantic to be part of this scene, and he felt that if he told everybody he was hip loud enough and often enough somebody would believe him. He never had a vision, though.

* * *

Jack and Neal's story:

Later much later than five o'clock in the morning Neal and I are falling out by the river flowing from all the great states up north that like spill and vomit themselves body and soul into the water and I'm digging it slip by in the dawn with the sun coming up as I'm telling myself in the southwest—we all learned as bright and eager kids that the sun around which we whirl in our beat eternal dance stands in the middle and the Earth itself comes up in the morning—I come up in the morning and I've never known a chick yet who didn't like mutter something and roll over and leave me wondering why the sun is coming up in the southwest which it looks like it's doing because upriver is north and downriver is south and I forgot that the goddamn river curves around this crazy city like crazy first one way then the other so you never know which direction you're facing and upriver and downriver don't mean a goddamn thing—America is having this problem every morning and like nobody in California cares all they care about is their surf which comes in straight and true and full of girls and in New York they don't care that the sun is coming up in the southwest because behind all the nowhere skyscrapers they don't know that the sun is even up yet until two in the afternoon and by that time it doesn't make a hell of a lot of difference where it came from—Denise is with us since we met last night under the sprawling live oaks of New Orleans all live oaks sprawl just like chestnut trees spread as in "Under the spreading chestnut tree" thus also the like sprawling live oaks of Audubon Park

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someday we'll teach the oaks to spread too and then the park will be more intimate—squirrels hopped across the grass like stones skipping across this river except like they don't have stones here all they have are little white shells which are useless for skipping I know I've tried—Lawrence is sitting behind us reciting his goddamn poem again I wish he'd write another one we're all bored as hell with it but it made him famous and he figures how many poems did Homer write—two, right—and Lawrence has like no pretensions to being as famous as Homer so he'll stop with one—William is getting high on the simple natural things the sun the river the floating logs the graceful ferryboats the cries of the gulls the tea he scored from some motorcycle brute—Allen walks up and sounds us what we're doing, man, what we're doing is digging the goddamn Mississippi River reflecting the goddamn sun rising in the southwest goddamn it—Allen thinks he's goddamn Walt Whitman and he wants to know what we're doing he's munching a goddamn doughnut and he's got powdered sugar all over his beard and his pants and Walt Whitman would never bug us what we're doing we're cheering the birds Allen we're digging the bugs sucking blood out of our arms what the hell does it look like—Neal comes over carrying a watermelon and nothing to cut it up with—What do the Negro kids do with them Allen asks and Denise sighs and says like They cut them up—by now the sun is high and it's daytime and we want to start getting with what we're supposed to be doing here but the river just keeps rolling like in the funky old song it really does and Neal says he's going to sit there until he sees the whole show so we cut out and leave him but then we run into Norman and that like kisses off the morning—Neal comes after us and sees Norman and says he wishes he'd stayed by the river where there were only rats but I say like we're all here for some reason—this goes down cool and there is general agreement.

* * *

Norman's story:

It was while I was listening to the radio, some station playing a recording of Sonny Rollins. I was eating oysters in a place on Iberville Street with white tiles on the floor and a long wooden counter. I was standing against the counter eating big, salty oysters. The radio was playing and I recognized that tenor sax. Then suddenly I wasn't leaning against the counter any longer. I was

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kneeling on a rocky hillside, and the wind was cold and the sun pale above me. I stood up and looked around. I didn't know where I was or how I had come there.

I saw a chick walking along a path not far away. I called to her. "Hello," I said.

The chick stopped and looked at me. She didn't say anything. She was tall and slender, dressed in a kind of free and unself-conscious way. She had huge, beautiful eyes and a wide mouth. It was a sensuous mouth, but I knew that it could also be cruel as well as afraid. She looked depressed. Her hair was pale gold and long, her skin as pale as the blossom of a magnolia, her eyes—they were green, not hazel eyes but the green of summer grass. "Hello," she said at last. Then she looked away from me.

"Hello," I said when I had walked nearer. "My name is Norman. Where am I?"

She made an odd little gesture. "This is . . . here," she said. "Mars."

"Oh," I said, "that explains it. I'm from Earth. The third planet. My name is Norman and I've written a very successful novel and many of the leading pseudo-intellectuals seem to believe that single-handedly I will lead American fiction out of the sterility and emptiness of the postwar period. I was eating oysters in a place in New Orleans and now I'm on Mars. I have my failings, I suppose, and my successes, but none of that explains why I've made this journey or how. None of that matters. The how and the why don't matter. All that matters is that I'm here. With you, on Mars."

She looked up at me. "I know all of this," she said. "I knew you would say just those words."

"How? How did you know?"

She gave me a crooked smile. "Aren't you ever lonely, Norman?" she asked. Suddenly she seemed cheap and gaudy.

"It would be better if I were a movie producer, wouldn't it?" I asked. I wanted to wound her, to see her flinch. "Or a well-known musician."

"It really doesn't make any difference," she said. She tossed her blonde hair over her shoulder and looked away, toward the empty red dust horizon.

"Isn't it enough that I've come? Isn't it enough that I'm the greatest novelist of my generation?"

She turned toward me again. Her green eyes were filled with intense pain. "We had novelists here too, once."

"What happened to them?"

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She shrugged. "They all died," she said. I wanted a cigarette.

That was Norman's story. It wasn't until we all got to Mars that we found out that it wasn't true, that he'd been like faking it. That didn't wig me out; I've had my suspicions about Norman ever since I dug that like he couldn't tell the difference between Gerry Mulligan and Paul Desmond, and they don't even blow the same horn. Sometimes Norman's like nowhere, man.

The visions ended. Nobody had another vision, although Norman claimed that he had like dreamed about this groovy place where academic honors grew on trees and the reviewers who said they hated your stuff were hunted down like dogs. Norman followed us around New Orleans but nobody paid any more attention to him; that would have been like encouraging him and it was too hot for that. We had sausage gumbo for lunch except for me, I had a cheeseburger on French bread and a cold bottle of Dixie, and that may have been one of the reasons I could not make the Martian scene with the others. Maybe I was not with-it. Maybe I was not real solid. I should have had the gumbo instead of something as hopelessly square as a cheeseburger. Maybe now I'd be roaming the brittle cities of Mars, clothed in white samite the way all alien geniuses are supposed to be. Look at me, I'm wearing these beat jeans and a shirt from Penney's and holed up in a glacial pad three blocks off Myrtle Avenue. For the want of a bowl of gumbo immortality was lost.

So instead of visions we soon cut out for the real thing, the true Mars of our dreams, through this frantic pink doorway in the air. It appeared out of like nowhere, on a streetcar about two o'clock in the morning. We were the only passengers and the conductor and the motorman never dug it. Denise saw it first and she nudged me and I nudged Jack and pretty soon like everybody had been nudged, even Norman. I picked up on what it was right off and so did everybody else except Norman, but Allen grabbed him by the arm and kicked his butt through the pretty pink cloud. Says Norman, as he landed on his face in the red sand, Dig it, Arizona.

We all looked up toward heaven, needing like strength to deal with this nebbish, and Lawrence said Man, we're here for sure this time and Norman just stared at him, still thinking he was like in the Painted Desert or something and flipping over *that* miracle.

Neal informed him that there were like two moons in the sky and Norman said I can dig that. Refraction.

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Nobody ever again tried to explain a thing to him.

We had split the world of our birth and now we dug that Mars had welcomed us in all her dry and red and sandy splendor. I took a deep breath and the air was just as crazy as in the vision. We looked around, expecting that somebody would be like waiting to lay his bit on us, we were there for some reason. We waited for a long time and the moons just slid across the sky like some gone cat and his old lady on their way to meet the man. It got cold. This is Mars? I thought, like if it was, where was the music and the poetry? What was the point, man? So far this interplanetary scene was nowhere, and I hoped each minute that I'd wake up in some far far better place, like the Hotsy Totsy on Bourbon Street which wasn't nearly so ethereal but a lot warmer and they had naked women on stage too.

"Peace, brothers," said a booming voice all around us.

William like wigged out, too frantic already without his tea to hide behind. The rest of us kind of flipped too.

And then this far-out couple of Martians appeared, out of a cloud or something. They were tall and thin and dressed in white with big golden eyes and no hair and ears like the curled leaves of a plastic philodendron, shiny and covered with dust. "I bring you glad tidings," said the second Martian.

Denise thought that was funny and when Allen asked her what she was laughing at she said the Martian sounded like an angel of the Lord and we all thought that was like pretty funny too except Norman who for a minute thought it might be true. The Martians waited until we got over our laughing.

"Like you are the real soul of Earth," said the first one. "Like you embrace the truth and heart and sinews of your people." We couldn't argue with that.

"Lay some truth on us," said the second Martian.

So Allen, high on the two moons or the golden eyes or pills, came out with this:

Naked souls, sensitive as clams from their shells untimely ripp'd,
dragged through caressing mists of wonder and outrage
to some empty giant vacant lot of the gods
questioning their sanity and their visions, violated furious
willing to understand willing to get with-it
not loving not caring not hating but sharing only the holy urge
to report, having found the human condition in the bus station
in a locker in a zipper bag in a cellophane bag filled with some

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anonymous substance, and slammed the locker door shut again
desperate not for knowledge but for feelings, and denied forever the blessing they seek by their own turbulent brains
who bore the burden of their dreams until their dreams could bear them
who stepped lightly over the threshold of promises and found, instead of demons, angels with golden eyes and empty hearts
asking nothing of the universe except its answers its secrets and every one of its treasures, sure that there must be new kicks somewhere
alone except for each other, with no sure idea of what good each other might be except for company, and in no need of company
except for the company of each other
forsaking Paterson Tangier Frisco New York for a whole world reminding them of a mighty Asbury Park without the boardwalk
without the arcades and without the ocean, an Asbury Park of the mind
forsaking Buddha Christ Jehovah for God knows what new gods and what new temples and what new prohibitions—

The first Martian raised his hand and said, "Wow, man, we're impressed, but we'll dig the rest of it some other time. Later."

Allen tried to tell him that he wasn't finished yet, that the groovy ad lib poem had at least another hundred lines to go, he could feel it, he knew he could blow like that for a couple of hours but the Martians looked drugg by the whole idea.

Denise gave them a swinging poem about suicide and advertising and Lawrence copped out with a rhymed couplet and I couldn't think of anything and they didn't even bother to ask Norman. They had the same opinion of Norman that we did. Jack and Neal put their heads together and spun this far-out narrative that none of us could figure, about steam locomotives and crumbling cathedrals in the sky and shock therapy and the clean cool sun of Mars as bright as brass. The Martians seemed to dig it, but I couldn't make sense out of any three words in a row. And William added a long and rambling history of the use of paregoric in treating loneliness boredom and perversion.

"Listen up," said the first Martian. "We have like brought you here because we are a bugged race."

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"We are wasted and strung out," said the second Martian, "and there's no hope of getting straight."

Denise sounded them about the poetry and music and singing and unearthly beauty, man, and they told us that all of that was in the past, long dead, a memory scene and nothing more. It brought us down to hear them talking like that. Jack said he didn't know we were getting an unfurnished planet.

"We're hip," said the first Martian. He let go a silvery tear from his golden eye. "All we got left here are a few funky pillars and the dry ditches where the fizzy water used to be."

"We thought your energy and creative spirit would like turn on this dying place," said the second Martian. "We brought you here to save the gig."

William didn't dig the idea at all. He said it was a shuck, and that we'd been busted for some eternal stretch in the interplanetary slammer.

The first Martian smiled. "Cool yourselves out," he said, "and dig our bit. Fall in with us for a few years and we can turn this place into a swinging spot again. We can make like these funky copies of you so your landlords and old ladies and your various other connections won't miss you. The copies won't be able to blow a lick, not the way you can, because like that's something we can't lay on them. That's why you're here in the first place. They'll just hold your place in line at the Unemployment Office. Then in twenty-five years we'll send you back to Earth, and you won't be a day older and you'll have such far-out wisdom that every hipster and square in the world will dig what you're sending."

William wanted to know if he could keep his copy of himself when he came home, but the second Martian said, "No, like we may be pretty with-it, but we're not *that* weird." William shrugged like he wasn't too disappointed.

"So," said the first Martian, "what's the word, hummingbird?"

Lawrence said Crazy, because not many people dig us now. We could get with these cats, and swing with them until we put the color back in their pillars and the fluted boats and whispering stones.

Neal was the next to agree and Jack agreed and Denise and Allen and William and Lawrence and Norman and me. Groovy, we said, let's go blow some jazzy verse.

The first Martian looked sad, you dig, and held up his hands. "All but those two," he said, and he pointed at Norman and me.

"They are not hip, they are not cool," said the second Martian.

"They do not share the real existential malaise," said the first.

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"They do not feel the crazy pulse of life, they do not dig the goneness of the void."

"They do not relate to the oneness of the worlds."

"They are into the whole ego bit, man."

"They are trying to hustle us for fame. They are squares wearing beards and talking hip, but they are a drag, man."

I thought Norman was going to flip his wig but I could handle it. Doing the Mars bit wasn't such a turn-on for me, and these Martian cats had me bugged from in front. I figured we could go back and do our writing thing for the folks at home for twenty-five years, and with Allen and Jack and Neal and Denise and Lawrence and William like out of the way we could become the boss hipsters, the voices of our generation. I laid that on Norman but he could never get with being left out of anything. The Martians escorted us back through the pink cloud without another word, and we were back on Earth just like that, back in New York in the middle of winter. Where was New Orleans, where was June? I don't know. We were standing on the corner of MacDougal and W. 3rd, and Norman's running after the fading cloud like Dorothy yelling at the Wizard in the balloon Take me with you! and I'm like wigging out at the poor bastard. Shane, I yelled, Come back Shane! It was just too weird.

Norman was sure that it was all because of the filthy word he introduced into modern literature and he promised he'd never do it again but the Martians were gone and we never heard from them again. So here we are, like stuck here on Earth while the rest of those cats are blowing sweetly among the sapphire spires and spider ships of Mars, beneath those two gone moons, grooving on ancient jazz and forgetting all about Eisenhower and Nkrumah and Sick Humor and the Champagne Lady and Brigitte Bardot and *Peyton Place*. Norman can like cool out and become the savior of the American novel in the latter half of the twentieth century, and I will end up the gonest poet and music critic of the *Village Voice* or something, and who needs Mars? In twenty-five years—1984, crazy, no?—Jack and Neal and those other cats are going to show up in their white robes and lyres and want their old jobs back, like swinging with the Martians made them farther out than anybody else and groovier and too with-it for words. We got twenty-five years to get ready for them and if they want to make the big scene then they're going to have to climb over Norman and me first. We'll see who's beat and who's hip and who's not.

As for the copies of Jack and Neal and Denise and William and

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Lawrence and Allen, the Martian cats were right about them: like they can't make a single line of poetry or one with-it image. So if you don't hear much from Jack and Neal and the rest between now and 1984, you know why. But like the fake Denise and the fake Lawrence are crazy canasta sharks, and sometimes Norman and I will invite them over for a night at a quarter of a cent a point. And the fake William turns out this wild avocado dip. So Norman and I got a lock on the prose and poetry industry at the moment, and we aim to keep it like that. If you want to know what happens, you just fall in come 1984. It's going to be War of the Worlds time. You dig? ●

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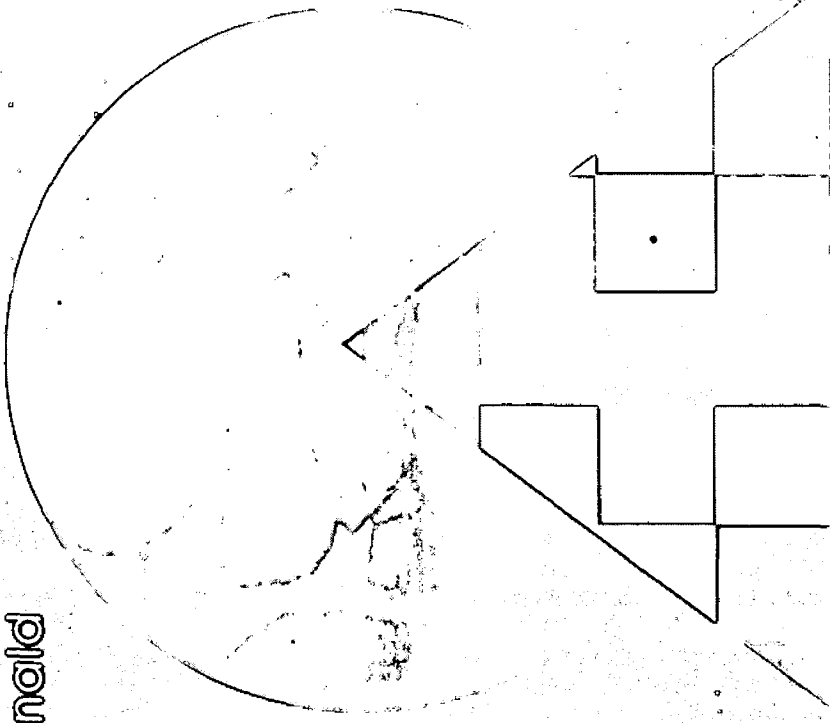
THE CATHARINE WHEEL



by Ian McDonald

art: Brocek Steadman

The author of this extraordinary first sale was born in England but migrated to Northern Ireland at the age of six. He is 23 and says that he turned to writing as a means of relieving boredom, and that he's currently working on a batch of short stories and a short novel.

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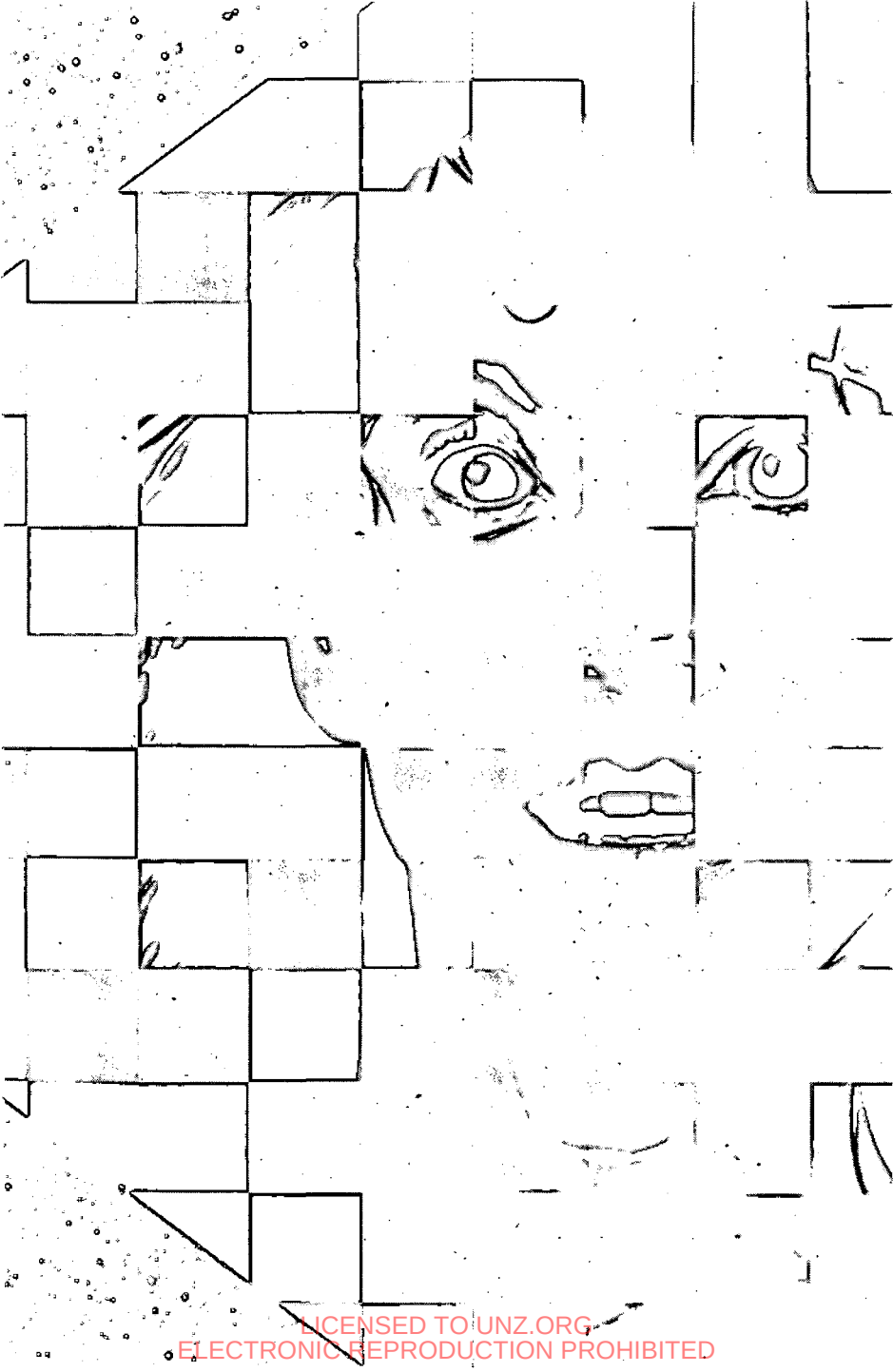

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"Come on, lad, come . . ." you hear a voice call, and, peering through the crowd for its source (so familiar, so familiar) you see him. There: past the sherbet sellers and the raucous pastry hawkers; past the crowds of hopeful Penitential Mendicants and Poor Sisters of Tharsis who press close to the dignitaries' rostrum; past the psalm-singing Cathars and the vendors of religious curios; there, he is coming for you, Naon Asiim, with hand outstretched. Through steam and smoke and constables wielding shockstaves who try to keep the crowd away from the man of the moment: here he comes, just for you, your Grandfather, Taam Engineer. You look at your mother and father, who swell with pride and say "Yes, Naon, go on, go with him." So he takes your hand and leads you up through the pressing, pressing crowd and the people cheer and wave at you but you have no time to wave back or even make out their faces because your head is whirling with the shouts and the music and the cries of the vendors.

The people part before Taam Engineer like grass before the scythe. Now you are on the rostrum beside him and everyone of those thousands of thousands of people crushing into the station falls silent as the old man holds up the Summoner for all to see. There is a wonderful quiet for a moment, then a hiss of steam and the chunt-chunt of rumbling wheels and like every last one of those thousands of thousands of people, you let your breath out in a great sigh because out from the pressure-shed doors comes the Greatest of the Great; the fabulous "Catharine of Tharsis" at the head of the last Aries Express.

Do you see pride in Taam Engineer's eye, or is that merely the light catching it as he winks to you and quick as a flash throws you into the control cab? He whispers something to you which is lost beneath the cheering and the music, but you hear the note of pride in it, and you think that is just right, for the Class 88 "Catharine of Tharsis" has never looked as well as she does on this, her final run. The black and gold livery of Bethlehem-Ares glows with love and sacred cherry-branches are crossed on the nose above the sun-bright polished relief of the Blessed Lady herself. Well-wishers have stuck holy medals and ikons all over the inside of the cab, too. Looking at them all leads you to realize that the cab is much smaller than you had ever imagined. Then you see the scars where the computer modules have been torn out to make room for a human driver and you remember that all those nights when you lay awake in bed pretending that the thunder of wheels was the Night Mail, the Lady was far away, hauling hundred-car ore trains on the automated run from Iron

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Hills to Bessemer. Since before you were born, "Catharine of Tharsis" has been making that slow pull up the kilometer-high Illawarra Bank. You have never seen her as she is today, the pride of Bethlehem-Ares, but your imagination has.

Now the people are boarding; the dignitaries and the faithful and the train enthusiasts and the folk who just want to be there at the end of a little piece of history: there they are, filing into the 20 cars and taking their seats for the eight-hour journey.

"Hurry up, hurry up," Taam Engineer says, anxious to be off. He pours you a sherbet from the small coldchest and you sip it, feeling the cool grittiness of it on your tongue, counting the passengers eighty, ninety, a hundred, still a bit dazed that you are one of them yourself. Then the doors seal, hssssss. Steam billows; the crowd stands back, excited and expectant, but not as excited or expectant as you. Down the line a red light turns green. The old man grins and taps instructions into the computer.

Behind you, the drowsy djinn wakes and roars in fury, but it is tightly held in its magnetic bottle. Just as well, you think, because your grandfather has told you that it is as hot as the center of the sun back there.

The crowds are really cheering now and the bands are playing for all they are worth and every loco in the yard, even the dirty old locals, are sounding their horns in salute as "Catharine of Tharsis" gathers speed. The constables are trying to keep back the crazy wheel-symboled Cathars who are throwing flower petals onto the track in front of you. Grandfather Taam is grinning from ear to ear and sounding the triple steam-horns like the trumpets of Judgment Day, as if to say, "Make way, make way, this is a *real* train!"

The train picks up speed slowly, accelerating up the long upgrade called Jahar Incline under full throttle, up through the shanty towns and their thrown-together ramshackle depots whose names you have memorized like a mantra: Jashna, Purwani, Wagga-Wagga, Ben's Town, Park-and-Bank, Llandyff, Acheson, Salt Beds, Mananga Loop.

Now you are away from the stink and the press of the shanties, out into the open fields and you cheer as Grandfather Taam opens up the engines and lets the Lady run. "Catharine of Tharsis" throws herself at the magical 300 km/hr speed barrier and in the walled fields by the side of the track, men with oxen and autoplanters stop and look up from the soil to wave at the black-gold streak.

"Faster, Grandfather, faster!" you shriek and Grandfather

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Taam smiles and orders, "More speed, more speed!" The fusion engines reply with a howl of power. "Catharine of Tharsis" finds that time barrier effortlessly and shatters it and at 355 km/hr the last ever Aries Express heads out into the Grand Valley.

For a long time I moved without style or feeling, wearing simple homespun frocks and open sandals in cold weather. My hair I let grow into thick staring mats, my nails began to curl at the ends. When I washed (only when people complained of the smell), I did so in cold water, even though some mornings I would shiver uncontrollably and catch sight in the mirror of my hollow blue face. I permitted myself that one vanity, the mirror, as a record of my progress toward spirituality. When I saw those dull eyes following me I would hold their gaze and whisper, "The mortification of the flesh, the denial of the body," until they looked away with an expression other than disgust.

I allowed myself only the simplest foods; uncooked, unprocessed and as close to natural as I could take it—for the most part vegetable. Two meals a day, a breakfast and in the evening a dinner, with a glass of water at midday. Cold, of course, but with the taste of Commissary chemicals to it.

Patrick fears that I am wasting to a ghost before his eyes. I reassure him that I am merely abolishing the excess and taking on a newer, purer, form. "Purity," I whisper, "spirituality." "Purity!" he says, "spirituality! I'll show you purity, I'll show you spirituality! It's us, Kathy; we are purity, we are spirituality because of the life we share together. It's the love that's pure, the love that's spiritual."

Poor Patrick. He cannot understand.

I've seen the needle and they said, —*This is purity*. Some showed me the secret spaces of their bodies and said, —*Here is spirituality*. Others held up the bottles for me to see: —*Look, purity: escape*; and I've seen the books, the red books, the blue books, the great brown ones dusty with age which say, —*Come inside, many have gone this way to wisdom before you*. What a pity that the blue books contradict the red books and the brown books cannot be read because they are so old. And you, Patrick, you are the slave of the book. You call it freedom: I have another name for what you give the name of Political Expression.

I've seen a thousand altars and breathed a thousand incenses, sung a thousand hymns, chanted a thousand canticles to gods a thousand years dead and been told, —*This is the way, the* only *way to spirituality*. Dancing-dervish under the love-lasers till

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dawn with men so beautiful they can only be artificial, I've been to the heart of the music where they say purity lies. Lies lies lies lies. The paintings, the altered states, the loves, the hates, the relationships: lies of the degenerates we have become.

Some day I will have to make Patrick leave. For his own sake as much as for the sake of my path to purity.

But he is my conscience. He makes me constantly ask, "Am I right, am I wrong?" and he must be a strong man indeed to be able to sleep night after night with the stinking animal into which I am changing. But I will cast him off, on that day when I achieve purity, because then I won't have any further need of my conscience.

In an age of decadence, I alone strive for purity. I saw it once, I looked spirituality in the face, and since that day I have sought in my own human way to embody it. But give Patrick his due: I am learning that perhaps my daily denials and asceticisms are not the best way to attain my goal. Perhaps the human way is not the way at all.

For the greatest spiritual experience (I would almost call it "Holy," but I don't believe in God) comes when I taphead into the ROTECH computers, in that instant when they cleave my personality away from my brain and spin it off through space.

To Mars.

I can't explain to Patrick how it feels, like I couldn't explain it to my colleagues on the terraform team how it felt that first time when I tapheaded into the orbital mirrors we were maneuvering into position to thaw the polar ice-caps.

I've tried to tell him (as I tried to tell them, hands dancing, eyes wide and bright) of the beauty of the freedom I felt; from the strangling stench of our decaying culture, from the vice of material things, from my body and the arbitrary dictates of its biology: eating, drinking, pissing, crapping, sleeping, screwing. He doesn't understand.

"Kathy, don't deny your body," he says, touching it. "Yours is a beautiful body."

No, Patrick, only spirit is beautiful, and the machine is beautiful, and only what is beautiful is real.

"But was she real?" you ask, and your grandfather replies, "Oh, certainly. I tell you, she was as real as you or me, as real as any of us. What use is a saint who isn't real?" So you look out through the screen at the blurred steel rail that stretches straight ahead as far as you can see, right over the rusty horizon, and you think,

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"Real, real, real as steel, real as a rail, rail made from steel." It is easy to make up rhymes to the beat of the wheels: diddley-dum, diddley-dum, real, real, real as steel.

An hour-and-a-half out. Back down the train the passengers are having lunch; the dignitaries in the first-class restaurant, everyone else from packages and parcels on their laps. Taam Engineer is sharing his lunch with you, savory pancakes and tea, because you did not bring any lunch with you as you never expected to be riding high at the head of the Aries Express deep in the magic Forest of Chryse.

You have heard a lot about the Forest of Chryse, that it is under the special protection of the Lady herself, that travelers come back from it with tales of wonders and marvels, with unusual gifts and miraculous powers, that some come back with only half a mind and some do not come back at all. Look at the trees, giant redwoods older than man reaching up three hundred, four hundred, five hundred meters tall; it is easy to believe that the machines that built the world are still working under the shadow of the branches and that Catharine of Tharsis walks with them in the forest she planted a thousand years ago. Aboard her namesake, you hurtle past at three hundred kilometers per hour and wonder how Saint Catharine could possibly have built an entire world.

"Look, son." Grandfather Taam nudges you and points to a place far up the valley where a great patch of brightness is sweeping across the Forest of Chryse towards you. You hold your breath as the huge disc of light passes slowly over you on its way to the distant rim walls. If you squint up through your fingers you can just about see the intensely bright dot of the sky-mirror way up there in orbit behind all the glare. Then you feel a blow to the back of your head . . . you see hundreds of intensely bright dots.

"How many times have you been told boy, don't stare at the sky-mirrors!" your grandfather bellows. "You can look at the light, but not at the mirror!"

But you treat yourself to one small extra peep anyway and you think of the men from ROTECH who are focusing all that light down on you, Naon Asiim.

"Remote Orbital Terraform and Environmental Control Headquarters." You whisper the name like a charm to keep the wind and the storm at bay and you remember what your friends told you: that the men up there who move the sky-mirrors have grown so different from ordinary people that they can never ever come down. That makes you shiver. Then you pass out from under the

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light, but out of the rear screens you can see its progress over the valley to the plateau lands beyond. In its wake you see a tiny silver bauble bowling across the sky.

"Look grandfather! A dronelighter!"

He gives it the barest glance, spits and touches one of the tiny ikons of Our Lady fastened above the driving desk. Then you realize what a mistake you have made, that it is the dronelighters and the 'rigibles of the world that have made your grandfather the last to bear the proud name of "Engineer," they are the reason why the museum sidings are waiting for the Lady just beyond the crowds at Pulaski Station.

"I'm sorry, grandfather." A hand ruffles your hair.

"Never mind, son, never worry. Look: see how that thing runs . . . It's getting out from under the skirts of the storm, running as fast as it can. They can't take the weather, they're flimsy, plasticy things, like glorified Festival kites."

"But *we* can take the weather."

"Go through it like a fist through wet rice-paper, my boy! I tell you, Bethlehem-Ares never lost a day, not even one single hour, to the weather: rain, hail, blizzard, monsoon, none of it stops the Lady!" He reaches out to touch the metal window-frame and you feel like shouting "hooray!" Taam Engineer (what, you wonder, will he call himself when the Lady is gone?) stabs a finger at the skyscreen.

"See that? Because of those things cluttering up the sky they have to move the weather about to suit them. That's what the mirror's for; those ROTECH boys are moving the storm up onto the plateau where it can blow itself to glory and not harm one single, delicate, dirigible. Puh!" He spits again. "I tell you, those things have no soul. Not like the Lady here, she's got a soul you can hear and feel when you open those throttles up, she's got a soul you can touch and smell like hot oil and steam. You don't drive her, she lets you become a little part of her and then she drives you. Like all ladies. Soul, I tell you." He hunts around for words but they evade him like butterflies. He waves his hands, trying to shape the ideas that mean so much to him, but the words will not come to him. "I tell you, how can you feel part of anything when you're flying way up there above everything? You're not part of anything up there like you're a bit of the landscape down here. I tell you, they've no soul. You know, soon it will be just them and the robots on the freight runs and then one day even they'll be gone, it'll be just the lighter-than-airs. The only engines you'll see'll be in the museums and God forbid that I should ever

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come to see that day." He looks at you like he wants you to back him up in what he has said, but you didn't really understand what he said because the rumble of the engines and the sway of the cab as it leans into the curves and drumming of the wheels saying "real, real, real as steel" is sending you off to sleep.

When I wake the sight disgusts me. Gap-toothed, crack-skinned, filthy-haired hag holding splintered nails up to the mirror whining, *The mortification of the flesh, the denial of the body.* Hideous. Futile.

Sleep came hard to me last night. Lying beside Patrick, staring at the ceiling, I had time and plenty to think. Letting the pieces tumble through my head, I saw how I was wrong, so wrong, so magnificently wrong. The mortification of the flesh is empty. It only serves to focus the mind more closely on the body it seeks to deny. Disciplining the body does not discipline the mind, for the greater the denial the greater the attention the body must be given. This is not the way to spirituality.

So before Patrick wakes I shower. I wash my hair, I trim my nails, I depilate, I deodorize, I even repaint the tekmark on my forehead and dress in the most nearly fashionable outfit I own. On the train downtown I just sit and watch the people. They do not know that I was the girl with the sunken eyes and the stinking hair they were so careful not to be seen staring at. Now I am just another face on a train. By denying the body I only drew more attention to it. The only way to achieve purity is to escape totally from the body. But that is impossible while we are on this earth. Not so on Mars.

Tapheading, for me, is like waking from a dream into a new morning. Eyes click open to the vast redscapes of Mars. You can hear it shouting, Real, real! with the voice of the polar wind. Let me tell you about the polar wind. For a hundred thousand years it blew cold and dry from the ice itself, but we have moved our orbital mirrors in over the pole and are thawing the cap. So now the winds have reversed direction and great thunderheads of cloud are piling up layer upon layer in the north. Some day it will rain, the first rain on Mars for fifty thousand years. I will rejoice at the feel of it on my plastic skin, I will laugh as it fills the ditches and dikes of our irrigation systems and I shall doubtless cry on the day when it touches the seeds of the Black Tulips I have planted and quickens them to life. But that is in the future. Maybe this year, maybe next year, maybe five years from now.

For the present I take joy in lifting my head from the planting

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and seeing the rows of Johnny Appleseeds digging and dropping and filling and moving on. They are mine. No. They are *me*. I can be any one them I chose to be, from Number 11 busily spraying organic mulch over the seedbeds to Number 35 trundling back to base with a damaged tread.

But I can be much more than that. If I blink back through the ROTECH computer network I can be a dronelighter blowing tailored bacteria into the air, or a flock of orbital mirrors bending light from round the far side of the sky, or an automated hatchery growing millions of heat-producing, oxygen-generating Black Tulip seeds for the Johnny Appleseeds, or a channel-cutter building the fabulous Martian canals after all these millennia, or a Seeker searching deep beneath the volcanic shield of Tharsis for a magma core to tap for geothermal energy, or an aveopter flying condor patrol high over the Mare Boreum, which will one day indeed be a Sea of Trees. . . .

I can be whatever I want to be. I am free. I am pure spirit, unbound to any body. And this is my vision of purity, of spirituality: to be forever free from this body, from earth and its decadence, to fly on into a pure future and build a new world as it ought to be built; as a thing of spirit, pure and untainted by human lusts and ambitions. This is a future that stretches far beyond my human lifespan. They say it will be eight hundred years before a man can walk naked in the forests we are growing in Chryse. Two hundred years will pass after that before the first settlers arrive on the plains of Deuteronomy. A thousand years, then, to build a whole world in. That will give me enough time to make it a proper world.

This is my vision, this is my dream. I am only now beginning to realize how I may achieve it.

But first I must dream again. . . .

It is not the rattle of the rain that has woken you, nor the slam of a passing ore-train on the slow up-line; it is something far less tangible than that, it is something you feel like the crick in your neck and the dryness in your mouth and the gumminess around your eyes that you get from having fallen asleep against the side window. So knuckle your eyes open, sniff the air. You can smell the rain, but you can smell something else too, like electricity, like excitement, like something waiting to happen.

Look at the screen, what do you see? Wind blowing billows across endless kilometers of wet yellow grass that roll away to the horizon. Low rings of hills like the ancient burial mounds of

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Deuteronomy lie across the plain: eroded impact craters, Taam Engineer tells you. This is Xanthe, a land as different as different can be from the forests of Chryse or the paddy-fields of the Great Oxus. A high, dry plainland where the Grand Valley begins to slope up to the High Country of Tharsis. But today the rains have come out of season to the stony plain, carried on an unnatural wind, for the ROTECH engineers and their sky-mirrors are driving the storm away from the peopled lowlands to the Sinn Highlands where it can blow and rain and rage and trouble no one. The sky is hidden by a layer of low, black, curdled cloud and the wind from the Sea of Trees blows curtains of rain across the grassland. Miserable.

You ask your grandfather how much longer and he says, "Not long, son, the storm will blow out within the hour and Xanthe's a poor land anyway, fit only for grazers and goatherds and getting through as quickly as possible." Grandfather Taam smiles his special secret smile and then you realize that, according to the story, this is where it all happened, where Taam Engineer—your own grandfather!—met the saint and so averted a dreadful accident. Now you know where the feeling of excitement has come from. Now you know why Grandfather Taam has brought you on the great Lady's last haul.

So you tell the old man, this is where it all happened and he smiles that secret smile again and says, "Yes, this is where it all happened all those years ago, long before you were even thought of; it was here the Lady worked a miracle and saved five hundred lives, yes, we'll be there soon, and look, even the weather is deciding to improve, look."

Out across the hills the sky is clearing from the North West. Light is pouring through the dirty clouds and the rain has blown away leaving the air jewel-bright and clear. "Catharine of Tharsis" explodes out into the sunlight, a shout of black and gold and the plains about her steam gently in the afternoon sun.

Lights flash on the control desk. Even though you do not understand what they mean, they look important. You direct Taam Engineer's attention to them, but he just nods and then ignores them. He even sits back and lights a cheroot. You thought he had given up those dirty things years ago, but when you ask him if there is anything wrong, he says,

"Nothing, boy, nothing," and tells you she's only doing what her high station expects of her, but you haven't time to think about that because the train is slowing down. Definitely, unmistakably. Her speed is now well under 100. You look to Taam

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Engineer, but he grins roguishly and does not even touch the keypad to demand more speed. He just sits there, arms folded, puffing on his cheroot as the speed drops and drops and it becomes obvious that the train is not just slowing, but stopping.

The nonstop Rejoice-to-Llangonnedd Aries Express grinds past a stationary chemical train down-bound from the sulphur beds of Pavo. The engines whine as they deliver power to the squealing brakes and the 700-ton train comes to a stand right out there in the middle of the pampas with not even a station or even a signal pylon to mark it as special and worthy of the attention of "Catharine of Tharsis."

A hiss of steam startles you, it is that quiet. Cooling metal clicks. Even the hum of the engines is gone, the fusion generators are shut right down. The rust-red chemical train looks almost sinister in its stillness.

"What now?" you whisper, painfully aware of how loud your voice sounds. Grandfather Taam nods at the door.

"We get out."

The door hisses open and he jumps out, then lifts you down to the ground. You can see the staring faces pressed to the windows all the way down the train.

"Come on," says Grandfather Taam and he takes you by the hand and leads over the slow down-line (you glance nervously at the waiting chemical train, half-expecting the automated locomotive to suddenly blare into life), down the low embankment and into the tall grass. He grinds his filthy cheroot out on the ground, says, "It should be around here somewhere," and starts thrashing about, whish whish swush, in the wet grass. You can hear him muttering.

"Aha! Got it! A bit overgrown, but that just goes to show how long it is since a human engineer ran this line. I tell you, in my day we kept the weeds down and polished the silverwork so bright you could see it shining from ten kilometers down the track. Come and look at this, son . . ."

He has cleared the grass away from a small stone pedestal. Inlaid in tarnished metal is the nine-spiked wheel-symbol of Saint Catharine. You can feel the devotion as your grandfather bends to rub the dirt of the years from the small memorial. When it is clean and silver-bright again he bids you sit with him on the damp crushed grass and listen as he tells you his tale.

I have told Patrick what I am going to do. I used the simplest words, the most restrained gestures, the shortest sentences, for

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I know how incoherent I become when I am excited. I did my best to explain, but all I did was scare him. Seeing me transformed, my body clean, my face pretty, again the Kathy Haan he had once loved, and then to hear me tell him of how I am going to cast this world away and live forever on Mars is too great a shock for him. He does not have to tell me. I know he thinks I am mad. More than just "mad." Insane. My explanations will do no good, he can't understand and I'm not going to force him to.

"One favor, Patrick. You know people who can get these things, could you get me two lengths of twistlock monofiber?"

"What for?"

"I need it."

". . . for your mad 'escape', don't tell me. Forget it. No, Kathy."

"But listen, Patrick . . ."

"No, no, no, I've listened enough to you already. You're a persistent bitch; if I listen to your voice long enough I'll find myself agreeing with whatever insane notion you suggest."

"But it's not insanity. It's survival, it's the only way for me to go."

"Oh, yes the only way you can be pure, the only way you can achieve spirituality. . . . What is it that's driven you to this, Kathy? It's suicide, that's exactly what it is!"

"The Crazy Angel, Patrick. At some time or another the Crazy Angel touches us all and we just have to go with the flow."

But he doesn't see the joke: if there is no God, how can there be any angel at all, Crazy or otherwise, unless it is me?

"Are we not enough? There was a time when it was enough for us to have each other. What more do you want, what more is there?"

"Do you really want me to answer that, Patrick?" I give him one of my fascinating half-smiles that used to excite him so much. Now it only angers him.

"Then what does Mars offer that I don't?"

Same question. This time I choose to answer it.

"Sanity."

"Sanity! Hah! You talk to me about sanity? That's rich, Kathy Haan, that is rich."

I remain patient. I will not allow Patrick to disturb me. I will not lose my head or shout at him. To do so would only be to play the game according to his rules, and his sick society's rules.

"Sanity," I say, "in a world where words like hunger and fear and disease and war and decadence and degeneration don't have any meaning, in a world that one day will be so much more than

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your earth could ever be. Freedom from a world that registers its terrorists, Patrick Byrne, and lets them kill who they will for their high and lofty registered ideals!"

That stings him, but I am relentless, I am the voice of final authority: the angel is speaking through me and won't be silent.

"And you will let me go, Patrick, you will get me those lengths of monofiber from your Corps friends, because either I go or your sick, sick society will have me off the top of a building in a week, and that is a promise, Patrick Byrne, a Kathy Haan promise: either way I go; either way you lose."

"Bitch!" he roars and spins round, hand raised to strike, but no one may lay hands on the Crazy Angel and live, and the look in my eyes stops him cold. Serenity.

"Bitch. God, maybe you are an angel after all, maybe you are a saint."

"Not a saint, Patrick, never a saint. A saint who doesn't believe in God? Not Saint Kathy, just a woman out of time who wanted something more than her world had to offer. Now, will you get me those bits of twistlock fiber?"

"All right. I can't fight the Crazy Angel. How long?"

I hold my hands about half a meter apart. "Two of them, with grips at both ends and a trigger-release twistlock set to fifth-second decay so they won't ever find out how I did it."

"I'll get them. It'll take some time."

"I can wait."

Expressions flow as words across his face. Then he turns away from me.

"Kathy, this is suicide!"

"So what? It's legal, like everything else from political murder to public buggery."

"It's suicide."

"No. Not this. To stay behind, to try and live one more year on this rotting world, that's suicide. More than that, it's the end of everything, because then I'll even thrown all my hope away."

It is a story old and stale with telling and retelling, but here, sitting on the damp grass under the enormous sky, it feels as if it is happening to you for the first time. Taam Engineer's eyes are vacant, gazing into years ago; he does not even notice how his stained fingers trace the starburst shape of the Catharine Wheel on the pedestal.

"I tell you, I thought we were done then. I'd given up all hope when that pump blew, with us so far out into the wilderness (and

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it was wilderness then, this was years back before ROTECH had completed manforming the Grand Valley . . . we were so far out that no help could ever reach us in time, not even if they sent the fastest flyer down from their skystations, and there were five hundred souls aboard, man, woman and child. . . .

"So I ordered them to evacuate the train, even though I knew right well that they could never get far enough away to outrun the blast when the fusion engines exploded. . . . But I had them run all the same, run to those hills over there . . . you know, to this day I don't know if they have a name, those hills . . . but I thought that if they could reach the far side then they might be safe, knowing full well that they never would. . . .

"All the time I was counting off the seconds until the pressure vessel would crack and all that superheated steam would blow my beauty to glory and us with her. I can remember that I had one thought in my head that kept running round and round and round: 'God, save the train, please, save the train God . . .' That was when the miracle happened."

An afterbreath of wind stirs the grass around you. It feels deliciously creepy.

"I don't know if it was my calling or the train's agony that brought her, and I don't think it matters much; but on the horizon I saw a black dot, way out there . . ." He points out across the waving grass and if you squint along the line of his finger into the sun you too can see that black dot rushing towards you. "An aveopter, black as sin and big as a barn, bigger even; circling over the line, and I tell you, it was looking for me, for the one who called it. . . ." Taam Engineer's hands fly like aveopters, but he is too busy watching the great black metal hawk coming lower and lower and lower to notice them. "And I swear she took the loco in her claws, boy, in her metal claws, and every bit of brightwork on her ran with blue fire. Then I heard it. The most terrible sound in the world, the scream of the steam release valve overloading and I knew that was it and I scrambled down this bank as fast as I could and threw myself onto the ground because death was only a second behind me, and do you know what I saw?"

Though you have heard the story a hundred tellings before, this time it takes your breath away. So you shake your head, because for once you do not know.

"I tell you, every one of those five hundred souls, just standing there in the long grass and staring for all they were worth. Not one of them trying to run, I say, so I turned myself belly-up and

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stared too, and I tell you, it was a thing so worth the staring that I couldn't have run, though my life depended on it.

"They'd stripped her down and laid her bare and unplugged the fusion generators and, by the Mother-of-us-All, they were fusing up the cracks in the containment vessel and running the pumps from zero up to red and down again, and those pumps, those God-blind-'em pumps, they were singing so sweetly that day it was like the Larks of the Argyres themselves."

"Who, Grandfather?" you say, swept away by the story, "Who were they?"

"The Angels of Saint Catharine herself, I tell you. They had the look of great metal insects, like the crickets you keep in a cage at home, but as big as lurchers and silver all over. They came out of the belly of the aveopter and a-swarmed all over my locomotive."

He slaps his thighs.

"Well, I knew she was saved then, and I was whooping and cheering for all I was worth and so was every man-jack of those five hundred souls by the time those silver crickets had finished their work and put her back together again. Then they all just packed back into the belly of that big black aveopter and she flew off over the horizon and we never saw her again, none of us.

"So, I got up into the cab and everything was all quiet and everything smelt right and every readout was normal and every light green, and I put the power on as gentle as gentle and those engines just roared up and sang, and those pumps, those pumps that so near killed us all, they were humming and trilling like they were fresh from the shop. Then I knew I'd seen a miracle happen, that the Blessed Lady, Saint Catharine herself, had intervened and saved us all. And I tell you this, I would still never have believed it had it not been for those five hundred souls who witnessed every little thing she did and some of them even had it recorded and you can see those pictures to this day."

Up on the track the chemical train fires up. The shocking explosion of sound makes you both jump. Then you laugh and up on the embankment the robot train moves off: cunk cunk, cunk cunk. Taam Engineer rises to watch it. When it is gone he pats the small stone pedestal.

"So of course we named the engine after her and put this here to commemorate the miracle. I tell you, all the engineers (in the days when we used to have human engineers) on the Grand Valley run would sound their horns when they went by as a mark of respect, and also in the hope that if they gave the Lady her due,

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one day she might pull them out of trouble. You see, we know that the Lady's on our side."

He offers you a hand and drags you up damp-assed from the ground. As you climb the embankment you see all the faces at the windows and the hands waving ikons and charms and medallions and holy things. It makes you look at "Catharine of Tharsis" again, as something not quite believable, half locomotive and half miracle.

Grandfather Taam lifts you up the cab steps. Suddenly a question demands to be asked.

"Grandfather, then why do the trains stop now if they only used to whistle?"

He reaches for the flask of tea and pours you a scalding cup. Behind you the djinn rumbles into life again.

"I'll tell you for why. Because she is not a saint of people, but a saint of machines. Remember that, because the day came when the last engineer was paid off this line and they turned it over to the machines and then they felt that they could honor their Lady as best they knew."

Lights blink red white green yellow blue all over the cab. The light glints off the holy medals and ikons but somehow it is not as pretty as it once was.

As if it were aware of my imminent escape into spirituality, the ugliness is drawing closer to me. Yesterday in the train I saw a licensed beggar kicked to death by three masked men. No one raised voice nor hand in protest. For one of the masks held out a Political Activist Registry card for us all to see while the other two beat the old man to death in accordance with their political ideals. Everyone looked out of the windows or at the floor or at the advertisements for sunny holidays and personal credit extensions. Anywhere but at the beggar or at each other.

I am ashamed. I too looked away and did nothing.

We left him on the floor of the car for others to take care of when we stepped off at our stop. A smart man I vaguely know with a highcaste tekmark glanced at me and whispered, "We certainly must remember to respect peoples' right to political expression; goodness knows what terrible things might happen if we don't."

Oh, Patrick, how many beggars have you killed in the name of political expression? Damn you, Patrick Byrne, for all the love I've wasted on a man who a hundred years ago would have been hunted down and torn apart for the common murderer he was.

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Dear God, though I know you aren't there, what sort of a people are we when we call terrorists "heroes" and murder "political expression"? What sort of a person is it who would dare to say she loved one? A Kathy Haan, that's what. But I will be rid of him.

Escape is two lengths of twistlocked monofiber wrapped up in my pouch, but have I the courage to use it? Cowardice is a virtue now, everyone has their Political Activist card to wave as justification for their fear. Be brave, Kathy.

I like to think of myself as the first Martian at these times.

It's not the loneliness that scares me. I have been alone for twenty-four years now and there is no lonelier place than the inside of your skull. What terrifies me is the fear of gods.

Deiophobia.

"Maybe you are an angel after all, maybe you are a saint," Patrick had said. What I fear most is that I may become more than just a saint, that the ultimate blasphemy to all that the sacrifice of Kathy Haan stood for will be for me to become the Creator God of the world I am building: the Earth Mother, the Blessed Virgin Kathy, the Cherished and Adored Womb of the humanity I despise.

I do not want to be God, I don't even particularly want to be human. I only want to be free from the wheel.

Smiles and leers greet me from friend and satyr alike. "Morning, Kathy (thighs, Kathy) 'day, Kathy, (breasts Kathy) . . ." I take my chair, still warm from the flesh of its previous occupant whom I have never known and probably never will, now. Warm up drill: codes, ciphers, and calibrations. The sensor helmet meshes with my neural implants and nobody sees me slip the coils of monofiber from my pouch and throw a couple of loops around the armrests.

Lightspeed will be the death of me. The monofiber is merely the charm I chose to invoke it.

"O.K. Kathy, taphead monitoring on . : ."

Needles slip into my brain and I slip my wrists through the loops, concealing the twistlock control studs in my palms. I had not thought death would be so easy.

Brainscans worm across the ceiling.

Listen: I have not much time to tell you this, so listen well. It takes six minutes for the oxygen level in the brain to fall to the critical point after which damage is irreversible. It is easy to do this. Damage to two major arteries will do very nicely, provided there is no rapid medical attention.

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But: it takes four minutes for the coded tadon pulse containing the soul of Kathy Haan to reach Mars. You can add. You know that if you add another four minutes return time from ROTECH to Earth that leaves you with a brain so like shredded cabbage that there's no way they'll ever be able to pour poor Kathy back into it again. I shall be free and I shall live forever as a creature of pure spirit.

I have invented a totally new sin. Is it fitting then that I should become a saint?

All I need do is press the buttons. The molecular kink in the monofiber will contract, neatly severing my wrists. A fifth of a second later they will dissolve completely. Lightspeed will do the rest. All I need do is press the buttons. They are hidden in my palms, slick with sweat.

"O.K. Kathy, counting down to persona transfer. Preliminary tadon scan on, transfer pulse on in five seconds . . . four . . ."

The mortification of the flesh, I whisper. Behind me someone shouts. Too late.

". . . one."

I press the buttons.

Green lights all the way down the line on the final run into Llangonnedd. Clear road: dirty freighters pulled into sidings blare their horns and the ugly, ugly robot locals squawk their nasty Klaxons as the Lady races by. Suburban passengers blink as she streaks past; by the time the shout reaches their lips she is around the next bend and leaning into the one after that like a pacehound.

And all the lights are green. More magic. Grandfather Taam tells you that you never get a full run of greens coming into Llangonnedd, no, not even for the Aries Express. Never ever. It must be more magic, of the same kind that let the Lady reach the incredible 450 kilometers per hour out there on the flats beyond Hundred Lakes. Grandfather Taam tells you she never touched 450 before, never ever, not even 400. Why, the people who built her had told him themselves that she would blow apart if she went over 390.

You reckon that engineers know nothing about engines and their special magic. After all, they are just engineers, but Grandfather Taam is an Engineer. Looking out of the side windows even a leisurely 250 seems frighteningly fast in these crowded suburbs. Canal flash houses flash fields flash park flash factories flash: you can feel your eyes widening in apprehension as the stations

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and the signals hurl themselves out of the distance at you. And all the lights are green.

That can only mean one thing.

"She's doing this, isn't she, Grandfather?"

A station packed with round-mouthed commuters zips by. Taam Engineer lights a cheroot.

"Must be. I've hardly had to lay a finger on those buttons for the past hour or so."

Beneath you the brakes start to take hold, slowing you down from your mad rampage through outer Llangonnedd to a more civilized pace. You say, "She really must love this train very much."

Grandfather Taam looks straight ahead of him down the silver track.

"After all, she did save it."

"But it wasn't the people, was it, Grandfather? It was nothing to do with the five hundred souls; she saved the train because it was the train she wanted to save. All those people were extra, weren't they?"

"They didn't matter to her one bit, boy."

"And you said she's a saint of machines, didn't you? Not a saint of people? That's why she loves the train, why she loved it enough not to let it die, isn't it? If there hadn't been a single person there, she would still have saved the train, wouldn't she? But, if that's true, why do people love her?"

"Love her? Who said anything about loving her? I tell you, boy, I have little love for Catharine of Tharsis. Respect yes, love no. And I'll tell you why. Because if she hadn't thought the train was worth saving, if she hadn't loved the train, she would just have let it blow those five hundred people to hell without a single thought. That's the kind of God those crazy Cathars are worshipping, but as to why they love her, I don't know. Do you have any idea why people would love someone like that?"

He looks straight at you. You have been expecting this question. You know that he has never been able to answer it himself, and that it is the reason why he brought you along on this ride.

"I don't know what I think . . . If she's really like that, then I think that most people must be very foolish most of the time, especially when they have to look for someone to help them when things go wrong and then put the blame on when things don't happen like they want. People are like that. I think if I were a saint like Saint Catharine I would be a saint of machines, too. Then I wouldn't care what people said about me or thought of me

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because I wouldn't be doing anything for them and they could cry away and pray away all day like those silly Cathars and the Poor Sisters of Tharsis and I wouldn't care one bit, because machines are never foolish."

"Catharine of Tharsis" has slowed right down. The end of the journey is near now. Tomorrow Taam Engineer and you will be flying home on one of those dreadful 'rigibles and "Catharine of Tharsis" will be taken away to the museum for foolish people to stare at and marvel over her record-breaking final run. And now you understand.

"Grandfather, of course I'd be a saint of machines! Because I could fly with the aveopters and the sky-mirrors and even the great SkyWheel herself and I could burrow with the Seekers and swim with the 'Mersibles, but most of all I could run with the Lady of Tharsis faster than she ever ran before and show off to everyone what a wonderful engine she is before they put her away for good in a museum. People are always moaning and complaining about their troubles and their problems; they won't let you run and be free from them, people won't let you do things like that!"

"Ah, the ways of saints and children," Taam Engineer says as the Lady rumbles over the Raj-Canal into the glassite dome of Pulaski station. Already you can hear the roars and the cheers of the crowds and every loco in the yards is sounding its horn in salute.

"Here, button three," Grandfather Taam says and you reply to the people with the wonderful blare of the steam horns. You press and press and press that button and the trumpets sound and sound and sound until the notes shatter against the glass roof of the station. And how the crowds cheer! Taam Engineer is hanging out of the window waving to the mobs of petal-throwing Cathars as the "Catharine of Tharsis" glides in to Platform Three as smooth as smooth. You are sliding the other side window open ready to cheer out when something stops you. An odd feeling like a persistent itch in the nose that suddenly stops or a noise in your ears that you never hear until it goes away. A kind of click. You shake your head but it is gone and you shout and wave for all you are worth to the excited people. They wave and call back to you, but you do not see them because you are really thinking about the click. For a second or so it puzzles you. Then you realize that it is nothing very important, it is only the empty space filling in where once there might have been a saint. ●

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(from page 71)

SECOND SOLUTION TO RIDDLES OF THE SPHINXES

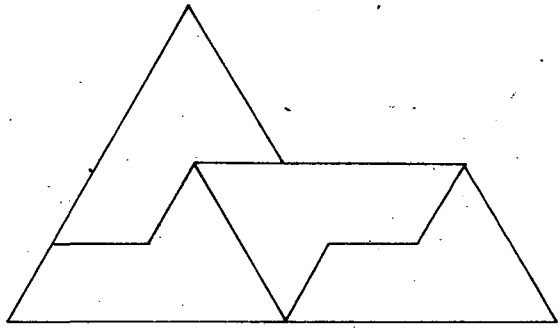

Figure 4

Figure 4 shows how a sphinx replicates.

Note that the original sphinx faces left. We will call it an L-sphinx. Of the four smaller sphinxes, only one is an L-sphinx. The other three face right, and are called R-sphinxes.

S. W. Golomb discovered the sphinx many years ago, and gave the name *rep-tile* to all polygons that can be cut into *n* identical replicas of the original shape. Some Golomb rep-tiles split into two replicas, some into three, some into five or more. The sphinx is the only known pentagon that splits into four. You can learn more about rep-tile theory and some of its fascinating unsolved problems by reading Chapter 19 of my book *The Unexpected Hanging* and *Other Mathematical Diversions*.

William Remme, of Eureka, CA, reading my remarks about 666, the number of the Beast (*IAsfm*, July 1983), wrote to point out that Ronald Wilson Reagan can be considered a candidate for the Beast since each of his names has six letters. But there is more. Remme discovered that if you use the cipher that I applied to Hitler (A = 100, B = 101, C = 102, and so on), the eighteen letters of Reagan's full name add to exactly 1984. I take this to signify that in November Reagan will either be elected president again, or he won't.

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RED SHIFT

by Judith Lessing

(With an introduction by Tess Westland)

Ms. Westland lives in semi-retirement outside Eugene, Oregon. She enjoys listening to National Public Radio, but her real love is still reading the Tarot for her visitors. In fact, it was a customer, Ms. Westland tells us— a Mr. Paul Witcover of Virginia—who, after reading a fragment of Judith's story left lying about, suggested that she try to have it published.

art: by John & Laura Lakey /Artifact

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If I could wish any part of myself young again, it would be my eyes, I think, for I made my living by them. I still do, though it's not much of a living, and I have this idea that every time I read anything but my cards I'm squandering some precious store of vision.

This idea, which has kept me away from books and newspapers and made me more at home now in front of a radio than I was as a girl, could not stop me from slowly typing out, over the course of months, the faded, brown ink of Judith's journal; nor can it stop me from piecing this introduction together.

I remember waking that morning, fifteen years ago, to find Judith gone and her journal tucked behind the secret door in my tarot table with my Cliff's Notes and plot summaries for those days my imagination couldn't prod the cards to life unassisted.

As the rest of the circus scoured town and country for her, I read what she had left behind. So I was not surprised when they straggled back hours later, empty-handed. I wanted to hold the pages out to them and shout, "Here she is!" But I said nothing; not when the police came, not when Mr. Marley came, not even when poor, doomed Tiny himself came.

After carrying the burden of her trust for all these years, suddenly it's grown too heavy; or perhaps it's I who've weakened. I sit in my old house, listen to the cars stream by on the highway, and wait for that rare, unhurried traveler who'll stop at my house with its old sign out front (from Wonder Circus days) and come to me to have his cards laid out.

But, as I said, my vision hasn't aged well. Often the cards I see before me serve only to set the ashes of old memories smoldering, the curious traveler leaves feeling unsatisfied and cheated. My telescopes are useless and nights, for the first time, truly dark. I don't mention this to gain your sympathy.

It's fortunate that Judith's journal reads more like a story than a journal, almost as though she knew I'd have it published one day. Well, I don't doubt it. Judith! Are you alive after so many years? Is it possible you will read this one day, or hear of it? I know, with you, that nothing is impossible.

I've no complaints about my life; my only regret is that you didn't trust me with more than just your journal. Soon I'll die, as surely as if I'd turned up my own final trump. Then I'll know if I've been fooling myself. But until then, I'll be at my roadside house, seeing my own past darkly in other people's cards, waiting.

—Tess Westland
Eugene, Oregon, 1982

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Mr. Marley's wagon seems perpetually faded even though Tiny touches it up once a year, sometimes twice. Upon each side is a sign that reads "Marley's Astounding Traveling Acrobatic Wonder Circus and Animal Menagerie" in exuberant blue, green, red, and gold brushstrokes. Mr. Marley's paternal grandfather founded the Wonder Circus sometime around 1912. One day Mr. Marley's father took over, and in the fullness of time passed it on to his son, the present Mr. Marley. There is a Marley IV now, my own age, but I doubt there will be a circus for him to inherit; like Marley IV himself, the Wonder Circus is the last of a once proud breed.

The rest of the wagon is crammed with scenes tracing the history of the Wonder Circus like a third-rate Sistine Chapel. The scenes crowd together like nostalgic ghosts mourning the living with tears of turpentine; oh yes, the Wonder Circus is dying, a decrepit elephant staggering toward some august graveyard. (Just try and explain this to Marley IV, however, with his funny ringmaster dreams!)

May I direct your attention to this plank, jigsawed with age like a dried-up riverbed, which preserves the slithering, slippery charms of Slytha the Snake Goddess, who shed her last skin (so Tiny informs me) in 1952? And there, in the top corner, one stumbles thirstily from the parched ex-river, through desert, and into an oasis where billowing tents pitched in the foreground of distant pyramids suggest an advertisement for Camel cigarettes; veiled beauties gather water in clay jugs which they balance adroitly on cranium while camels of the mammalian variety doze beneath lush palms. (Our last camel died when I was two.)

In fact, these days the Animal Menagerie proclaimed so boldly with a golden flourish is reduced to a scrawny crew of cantankerous apes (lower left-hand corner, beside the elephant, now deceased), Precious and Lad's Lady, two aging showhorses who double as beasts of burden (appearing for a limited time only, thanks to a busted engine, hitched to the front of Mr. Marley's wagon), and Vladimir Karamazov, the dancing, juggling, and wrestling bear (seen ambling head-over-shoulder from the oasis like a beast cast from Eden).

From this auspicious exterior, dusted with a few dimming stars among shrunken dwarfs and nova afterglows, I can envision the interior with a sorcerous acumen which would make even Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyant, somewhat envious. (Well, not totally sorcerous; I was born there, after all, and I don't suppose things have changed that much in fifteen years.)

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I see a cluttered space, half-office, half-home. I see an untidy desk with stacks of bills and a safe without the funds to pay them. I see, in another pile on the desk, letters from anxious creditors and notices of canceled bookings. All of this I remember from the frenzied hours immediately following my birth and Mother's death (frenzied, that is, for everyone save myself and, presumably, Mother; I passed the time in observation and meditation).

But I see something else on the desktop as well, a smaller stack of correspondence pushed to one side, its existence perhaps forgotten, certainly postponed. These letters represent the long arm of the law, of fabled reach and as many fingers as there are misguided samaritans in the world. Surely (they ask) a more supportive environment could be provided for that unfortunate girl than a flea-bitten itinerant circus; a better parent than an alcoholic ex-strongman; friends of her own age and, frankly, species. A minor headache amidst brain tumors to Mr. Marley, but not to me. I like the Wonder Circus, and don't want anyone to take me away from Tiny. Here in our wagon, a boozy Tiny playing watchdog, I shiver at the thought and move on.

To the man seated behind the desk, also nursing a bottle. His ringmaster's suit of red and gold is a faded sunset, his hair prematurely gray, his forehead, well, I could count the furrows but I'm not supposed to be that smart. In bed behind him, Marley IV cavorts in dreamland, cracking that leather whip at pretty showgirls' behinds, center ring, spotlight please, on the new, improved Wonder Circus.

Well. Not bad. Of course, if I'd been in the Wonder Walk, my hand on the Star Stone and around me the tarot of Medusa's petrified head, Jack and Jill the two-headed fetus, the genuine Holy Grail and the horn of the last Unicorn, the reading would have been much, much more exciting; escape velocity from present to future achieved every time.

Which puts me in mind of Tiny's trips in the opposite direction.

Births and deaths are as ephemeral as the shadows of clouds to Tiny, so even though his heavy drinking started after I was born, I don't think I caused it as people say.

At the age of fifty-five, his fantastic strength undiminished, Tiny's mind, never a pristine chapel, began to lose itself behind a lifetime of scrawled graffiti. Madame Sosostris used to tell me stories of how, by the end, Tiny would cower in the center of the ring and whimper like a trapped animal as the crowd hooted and Mr. Marley screamed directions to simple strongman tricks he'd forgotten from the night before. Soon Mr. Marley retired Tiny,

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although he gave him a job as a handyman so he could stay with the Wonder Circus.

Tiny began to drink; not to punish himself, not to remember, not to forget. He drank and he drinks to catalogue in dreams that endless list of days that never were and might have been.

Then he is happy, but the necessity of dreaming is a weakness Tiny carries like an old injury from the one weight he could not lift.

At each performance Tiny was a backstage fixture. Propped in the wings and reeking of cheap booze, he would preside over the decay of the Wonder Circus in a drunken fugue, his eyes wide open but tuned to another channel.

One night Tiny was in his usual position as two of the clowns gamboled into the big top leading Vladimir Karamazov through the sawdust by two long leashes. (Vladimir Karamazov is something of a fixture himself. A twenty-year veteran of the Wonder Circus with untold years of European service behind him, for a bear he's ancient.)

He trundled along as though on wobbly wheels, some kid's neglected toy, bent into a patchy black-furred ball which rarely uncurled anymore. I sometimes imagine him as he must have been in his prime: erect, six feet tall and four feet wide, all muscle, ladies and gentlemen, that black fur, bristling as if electricity rather than blood, was rushing underneath it. At such moments he must have transcended his identity and become something beautiful and terrible, a savage god, although really it was just another trick to impress the crowd, even simpler than the juggling and mincing dance steps, to tell the truth.

Curled in upon himself in those threadbare years of his life, Vladimir Karamazov must have, like Tiny, reinvented past performances, again bringing the crowd to its feet by batting a record-breaking eight oranges from paw to paw while balancing on one leg or gyrating madly in an authentic kazatska.

Each night he was dragged into the spotlight by clowns, and he would allow them to break for a while the spell of bearish memories he was hibernating in, as though through a hard winter, and bat pathetically at two oranges, reduced now to mere comic relief but still a crowd pleaser, still a money maker, valuable until death and, who knows, perhaps beyond, stuffed and mounted like some fearsome museum relic along the Wonder Walk.

But that night Vladimir Karamazov curled so tightly into his past that he must have turned himself inside out, because no

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sooner did he reach the center of the ring than he reared back and with two mighty tugs wrenched the hapless clowns off their feet and tumbled them headfirst into the sawdust. His huge head snaking from side to side, his breath rasping in deep growls, his eyes orange marbles, Vladimir Karamazov lurched toward the closest seats like Boris Karloff on the late show.

The audience screeched their good-humored terror, although some parents, I'm sure, felt the Wonder Circus had gone a bit too far with this particular act. But who wanted to be remembered for years as the first to bolt for the exits?

At that first cry from a hundred throats, Tiny, in the midst of lubricating his own throat with some Old Forester's, seemed to slide deeper into his dreams. Setting the bottle on the ground without spilling a drop, he glided forward like a sleepwalker, utterly quiet, his face serene.

Vladimir Karamazov pricked his ragged ears at the soundless footsteps and turned. Like two wrestlers they circled, each gauging the other, respectful and cautious, as Mr. Marley tore at his hair and yelled for the clowns to call the police, the fire department, the National Guard, before Vladimir Karamazov mauled Tiny and the Wonder Circus out of existence.

And then, as if at some prearranged signal, they rushed together, colliding with a thud that shook the big top. Back and forth through the sawdust they raged, first Tiny, then Vladimir Karamazov in control. Like a boxer, Tiny hammered away at Vladimir Karamazov's belly and snout. Recalling old acrobatic skills, Vladimir Karamazov whipped his clawless paws through deadly pirouettes and danced his kazatska with swift kicks to Tiny's shins.

Finally they wrapped their huge arms about each other and fell to the sawdust where they flapped around like fish out of water. In five minutes it was over. Nonchalantly, Tiny stood up and offered his hand to Vladimir Karamazov. The two wrestlers sauntered from the ring on two and four legs, respectively, to where Tiny had left the bottle of Old Forester's. Breathing heavily, he grabbed the bottle, upended it and guzzled half, then held it steady as Vladimir Karamazov tossed off the rest. Then, two old troupers, they exited to the wings. The applause was deafening and lasted for fifteen minutes. Mr. Marley clapped loudest of all.

So Tiny got his job back, but the funny thing is that in order to wrestle he has to be drunk, so he drinks just as much as ever. And, like a friend under the bad influence of an old war buddy,

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Vladimir Karamazov joins him on his binges. They sigh and belch together, exhaling dreams like smoke through a spotlight.

I've forgotten the name of the town we pulled into this afternoon. Buildings change, and people, but something beneath all that seems to remain as constant from town to town as the peeling, silver-coated Civil War markers spiked along the back roads or the well-meaning welfare representatives who pester Mr. Marley to give me up to the affections of the State. It's enough to start creepy thoughts, like we're some Dutchman circus doomed to wander in circles and play always to the same town, a town that sprouts new buildings and bodies at each intersection. . . .

Herndon, that's it. Of course, the good people of Herndon don't see themselves as I see them; in their eyes they are far superior to, say, the people of Oakton, upstate. I understand that I do them a disservice, but they get revenge: I don't believe they ever notice how the Wonder Circus dwindles each year, how the shows get shorter and old acts vanish, never to be replaced. Or, if they notice anything, it is the rise in ticket prices from one year to the next.

This afternoon a tribe of footballers from the local high school arrived bearing girls and six-packs, to help us set up.

Not that it's a big job anymore, with just four wagons left from the glory days when Marley's Astounding Traveling Acrobatic Wonder Circus and Animal Menagerie boasted fully eleven wagons, and plenty of horses to pull them too. But it's still more than Tiny can handle, especially with the enthusiastic assistance of Mr. Marley, Marley IV, Madame Sosostris, and the rest of the group. I'd like to help Tiny, but even such meager activity as planting stakes for the tents is well beyond my supposed capacity for purposeful thought and action.

I was resting in the shade of the famed Animal Menagerie as the two carloads of local heroes made their timely, dusty entrance.

After parking on the fringes of this field we have appropriated, they clustered, joking among themselves, fully aware of the nascent Wonder Circus but in no hurry to acknowledge it.

Then one of them, big-boned and sandy-haired, a fullback glory boy, sashayed up to Tiny and offered him a beer in that eternal gesture of respect and equality between the strong. Tiny—dear Tiny, named not for his size or his heart but his intellect, a fitting dad for yours truly—wanted to accept, but was unsure of Mr. Marley's reaction. So he grinned instead and pawed the sweat from his brow as Mr. Marley himself walked up.

As usual, quite inadvertently, Tiny managed to stumble into the center of attention; at the edge of the field, the kids nudged

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each other with tanned elbows and chuckled as Tiny's grinning face swung from side to side like a well-used saloon door.

Hearing their laughter, Tiny turned, but the laughter roosting on his own lips died there as he noticed, for the first time, the retinue of nymphets. Tiny's grin melted in a nuclear blush; he swung clumsily at a tent-peg with his sledgehammer, provoking additional mirth.

I wondered if Tiny was punishing his body for failing to follow the lazy currents of emotion that, in his mind, pass for thought. Or was his outburst meant to express frustration at the kids' taunts; the tent-peg that he drove into the hard dirt was only the most convenient member of that frighteningly large class of objects and things which he must view as "not-Tiny," like the kids themselves.

But Tiny cannot stay upset for long, whether at himself or others; in moments the offensive scrawl on his memory's slate is lost, scribbled over, impossible to locate again. Soon he was grinning as though nothing had happened, back to square one.

And by then, with a solemn yet hearty shake of hands, agreement had been formalized between Mr. Marley and the fullback. Out came the free passes Mr. Marley carries for just such occasions. Around went the beers (even to Tiny, who nodded appreciation, yet still seemed wary of drinking). From one of the cars, an old, old black Buick streaked with red flourishes about the fenders, a tape-deck began to spit rock and roll of the holy, hollow variety so popular in the South and Midwest. Down came the sun; up, like dreary and dutiful ladies, rose the tents, up into the cool evening, canvas cracked smartly by the wind.

As the men worked, the girls grew bored, and soon began to cast curious eyes around the rest of the grounds. From the Animal Menagerie, I fielded a few glances; in the dusk I must have seemed like one of them, only more so, a teenage trapeze-artiste or horse trainer, gypsy girl (on Mother's side) of the sawdust. But as they hesitantly stepped forward, Marley IV swooped to intercept, graciously offering the full tour, which they were pleased to accept. Throughout, Marley IV radiated superior disdain, as though possessed, by the rigors of the circus life, of some great Secret which, for an unspoken price, he could be persuaded to share, although inside I knew he was terrified by their nearness. As they approached I heard:

"It must be great to live in a circus."

"It's okay. Hey, you wanna see the monkeys?"

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"Monkeys!" Long pause. "You mean like little, cute monkeys, or gorillas?"

"Oh, you'll see," bwana Marley IV replied.

By which time he had brought the girls close enough to see plainly that I was not one of them, could never be. As they walked past, the girls fell into an awkward silence, as though out of respect for the dead. Marley IV, meanwhile, chattered on: "That's just Judith; don't mind her. Come on in here, up these steps." Inside the wagon, Vladimir Karamazov barked gruffly; the girls squealed with delighted fear. "We keep these tranquilizer rifles in case he escapes," drawled Marley IV, thinking, I knew, of other game.

Twilight is kind to me. Cloaked by shadows I can move with greater freedom than in the daytime, yet I'm not totally shrouded in darkness. When people see me in twilight, a blur among other blurs, they rush to supply what's missing and I become, for a time, one of them. Conversely, I sometimes enjoy pretending that each hazy shape I see delineates a being like myself in every way.

So, as they labored, the footballers looked more and more in my direction the darker it got, their imaginations working best when supplied with least. One in particular, the Fullback who had offered the beer to Tiny and bargained with Mr. Marley, would prop himself against his sledgehammer, sip at his warm beer, and stare thoughtfully toward where my inky outline seemed to dissipate into the night sky, seep into the ground and melt into the Animal Menagerie all at once.

I returned his stare, seeing a patch of dark just more solid than the night, imagining all sorts of asinine romances. I thought of what a blessing blindness might be, for one. Or a world of utter, polar darkness where fire had never blossomed, sparing us forever its petals and its thorns.

Finally, the work completed, or as nearly completed as the day would see it, the Fullback started over. As he approached, I played the Eternity Game; first he was halfway to me, then closer by half, then half of that again, and so on, so that I could label my reactions as he neared and rank them however I chose, by order of occurrence, by strength of feeling, by length of same, et cetera. For example: fear first and foremost, delicious and precognitive; guilty excitement because I dreaded that he would stop, turn around before reaching me; anger that I could say nothing to him, and humor at the whole ridiculous misunderstanding about to take place which, I also realized, I was doing nothing to avert even though it certainly lay within my power to spare the both

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of us an embarrassing confrontation. But I wanted to hear his voice, to know that he saw me truly, as I am, despite the night.

But he stopped well away from me, respectful of whatever barrier I may have imposed around my solitude. He could see more of me, I knew; yet, seated on the ground as I was, my knees drawn up to my chin and a hooded jacket bunched around my shoulders, I remained ill-defined.

"Hey. Howzit goin'?" he asked, hands in jeans' pockets, elbows splayed at a jaunty angle.

I, of course, could not reply; but I moved a bit, stretched my legs, to let him know I had heard.

"You live here?" Taking my motion for invitation, he walked a few steps closer and squatted on his haunches. "Say, I'll bet you've been all over the place, huh? What's your name?"

He nodded his head after a time, as though my silence had confirmed some guess of his. "You know, that kid took everyone else for a look-around, how about you doing me?"

I had been watching Tiny and Mr. Marley creep up on the Fullback for awhile, but he'd been too absorbed in questions to hear their approach. Now a flashlight beamed into my face and a huge paw of a hand clapped itself onto the Fullback's shoulder. He yelled mightily, whether at the sight of my face or the sudden pressure of Tiny's hand I don't know—both must certainly have been unexpected—and fell back onto the grass. He was up in a flash, battle-honed reflexes on twenty-four-hour alert, but Tiny kept that shoulder in a vise.

"This is Judith," Mr. Marley said. "Tiny's daughter. We're very solicitous of Judith because of her condition."

"Yes sir," rasped the Fullback. His eyes were bulging, his skin pale, as if he'd been caught masturbating by the Coach before the Big Game.

"She has hydrocephalus. Do you know what that is?" Good old Mr. Marley, ever the ringmaster.

"No sir."

"Well, it's a condition characterized by an abnormal increase in the amount of fluid in the cranium, causing enlargement of the head, wasting away of the brain, and loss of mental powers." Whew! You've got to admire a man with a tongue that oily; for Mr. Marley it was either salesman, sportscaster, or ringmaster.

"Yes sir." The Fullback swallowed, taking it better than I'd expected. "I'm real sorry."

Mr. Marley nodded. "We all are, son." Tiny dropped his hand

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and just stood there. He looked pretty sorry all right. "It was dark; you couldn't really see. No harm done."

Together, they strolled back to the others.

"But that's terrible," I heard the Fullback complain as they walked out of sight. "She looks so healthy too. I mean except for her head; the rest of her body."

I like to imagine that people ascribe my silence to shyness at first, that they see me in a romantic light, like the heroine of some terribly out-of-fashion novel. Then, when they discover I'm mute, their admiration balloons with sympathy. Only then do they notice my swollen head, bloated and sagging with sudden depressions like a months-old pumpkin, not a Jack but a Judith-o-Lantern, symbol of some private Halloween.

At this point I generally imagine how, practically gagging on charitable impulses, they adopt me and finance the operation to correct my hydrocephalus; or, alternatively, the brilliant young surgeon, out to the Wonder Circus on some boyish whim he barely understands, vows to love and care for this proud but tragic figure of a girl.

Of course, the first thing they really notice is my head, and I'm rarely spoken to after that, so most folks never learn the muteness addendum. People point or pointedly do not point; children giggle, mistaking me for a clown, and are shushed by red-faced mothers who seem angry with me for some reason; rowdy teenagers engage in good clean malice or wander off confused and thirsty into the sunset like my Fullback, never to return.

I try not to be bitter, and mostly succeed, because I remind myself that, although dumb, I am no idiot. I can read and write circles around most fifteen-year-olds if Marley IV is any indication; self-taught too. People see me and make faulty assumptions which I know better than to correct.

Having grown up in a circus, I've learned enough about freaks to recognize myself; enough about hydrocephalus to know that my brain should be too soggy to spark, floating in my head like Jack and Jill in their formaldehyde universe. I also figure that the circus is the best place for a freak like me to hide. Here, as long as I behave the way people expect, I am rewarded by their pity or disgust or indifference; out there I would be an object for study, psychological (at least) dissection, and I'd hate that! I like people, and even though I sometimes frighten them and make them uncomfortable, I don't think they dislike me; I think that when they see me they see themselves or their children gone bad. We circle each other warily, blind animals afraid of touch, and

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we touch. Then maybe we lose a little of our fear, because at least there's something genuine formed when we collide, a brief bond between strangers reassuring us both that we exist.

Which is why the welfare agents frighten me with their good intentions. State care means visits to the doctor, operations, all sorts of risks I do not care to take with my fragile and precious consciousness which, after all, I figure I possess only by a fluke anyway. Frighten people too much and science overpowers the best intentions. Instead of pity, they learn to kill.

When I think like this, which is often, I wind up at the Wonder Walk. Let my Fullback comfort himself with friends and drink. I have my own methods.

It is always gloomy inside the Wonder Walk. Partitions jut sharply from walls and other partitions to form angular passages which direct and misdirect patrons as in an Egyptian tomb where the false passages and dead ends are many to ensure that only the wise and worthy reach the center. Stepping inside is like entering an optical illusion, a singularity. The farther in you go, the bigger it seems to get, until, by the time the center is gained, it seems inconceivable that you have not left the wagon through some mazy, other-dimensional corridor. (Of course, I know the secret. At the entrance are arrows, provided by Mr. Marley, to point the way. I go in the opposite direction and come to the center after turning three corners; I've never believed it necessary to purchase illumination with the scrip of suffering.)

The Wonder Walk was deserted. I ran to the center, then paused and shut my eyes tight, feeling out for the Star Stone with my hand, letting it fill my thoughts with sight.

At this point in the real show, spotlights flare on each exhibit in turn, accompanied by the thunder of Mr. Marley's pre-recorded pitch.

The first thing the patrons see is a large glass jar. It flashes, tossing back the blue-red lights, but if the audience peers closely they can make out one form . . . no, two . . . or is it only one? It is Jack and Jill, the two-headed fetus, shrunken, wrinkled and as peaceful as a drowned, mutant Buddha. "Tragedy of Science or triumph of black magic? Dead or sleeping? And, if asleep, what dreams etch such shrewd smiles on their wizened faces? Perhaps, ladies and gentlemen, it is best not to question, but to accept; perhaps we have spied for too long already, and our own faces, one by one, are slipping, as though onto a movie screen, into the endless, ageless dream they share. . . ."

Suddenly Jack and Jill vanish, and before the audience can *ooh*

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so much as a single *ahh,* a violet spotlight sparks onto a glass dome. Within the dome, a fluted horn, spiraling more gracefully than a gazelle's, of a color so white as to appear fluorescent in the violet light. "Ladies and gentlemen. How often has science scoffed at the myths of the ancients only to discover their essential truth? Surely, deep within the collective unconscious we all share, each of us recognizes this horn of the purest ivory, this symbol of purity and truth from an age more pure and true than our own."

Again darkness, before the more skeptical audience members can step forward to discover if the horn is ceramic. Then a single, cold blade of white light; struck with the light, a rainbow blazes from jewels crafted into the sides of a golden goblet rimmed with silver. "It was the glory and the ruin of the greatest knights of the Round Table: Launcelot and Galahad; the triumph of Sir Perceval. In a sense, the sad epitaph of King Arthur and the Age of Chivalry. The last goblet to touch the lips of our Savior, ladies and gentlemen."

The light dims; the image of the Grail lingers as though the jewels flicker with an almost forgotten light. Then the green light leaps. "The most terrible visage in all history, ladies and gentlemen. In the golden age of the poet Homer, it was said that anyone who met her gaze was transformed to solid stone. For centuries she tyrannized the world, until Perseus turned her power back upon itself with a mirrored shield. It is said that if ever another mirror holds her image, the stone will soften, the asps nesting in her brain will writhe anew, and Medusa will live again. Is there an adventurous young lady with a compact, perhaps, who wishes to test this prophecy?"

But the light is gone before anyone can react. Now all the colors of the spotlights are thrown onto a coal-black stone the size of my fist, where they dance from the tips of embedded crystals. "All the objects you have seen here tonight, ladies and gentlemen, have come from the past. Now we give you the future. A stone tumbled from a star, a Star Stone, bathed in countless radiations unknown to science over the billion years or more it took to reach our planet. Did it arrive by accident, or was the Star Stone sent to us by beings as far above us as we are above the amoeba? Perhaps, even as we speak, it is waiting, waiting for the signal that will instruct it to release all its energy and transform us into gods . . . or destroy us."

Melodramatic, but it sells papers.

As usual, when the power surged into me I was also drawn into

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the Stone, as though a vacuum had been created between us; an invitation offered to let go of my body and escape into the Stone itself, to become a new crystal blazing upon its surface with unimaginable energies. I won't deny I've been tempted at times to test the depths of the Stone's abyss, especially at first.

At first I was inside Mother, the predecessor of Madame Sosostris, a (self-proclaimed) full-blooded gypsy who called herself Orlando. There, in the fluids of Mother's womb, I floated and understood many things. I knew of the hydrocephalus, which, even then, was wasting my brain; without fully comprehending the idea of speech, I understood that power was to be forever denied me. There was no part of my body or Mother's that I did not know, down to the thin uterine wall which would burst as she birthed me; me nearly drowning as she hemorrhaged to death in Mr. Marley's wagon; the Wonder Circus fifty miles from the nearest town. These were not happy truths.

But they came to me magically. Perhaps all children of gypsies are natural fortune-tellers; or perhaps it was the Stone, although I had not yet come to associate the gentle tug I felt behind my consciousness with the Star Stone, indeed, hadn't conceived of its existence at all. It was only later, "outside," that I realized others were different from me, and later still before I realized just how different. . . .

Behind my still sealed eyelids, I saw:

A golden chalice, rimmed with silver, filled with wine. And in the wine I saw:

A fetus with two heads, one male, one female, floating, dreaming. And in those dreams I saw:

A white mare with a single ivory horn, shivering in labor. And from that mare was birthed:

A woman with a woman's full body and a misshapen head that crawled with snakes.

The snakes struck the mare. The mare turned to stone. From her ivory horn, blood dripped to the earth, filling it like a chalice.

It seems straightforward now, but then it was my first deal of the tarot packed into the Wonder Walk. Even so, I read them right: Mother's death, my sickness, all as I've mentioned already.

Since that first vision the images haven't changed but the readings always do. Jack and Jill, Medusa, the Grail, the Unicorn's horn; out of their constancy new patterns are constantly shuffled. And so, the more I used the Stone, the clearer it became that my first vision contained all others, even those as yet undreamed.

Still, I was not prepared for what I saw tonight. I ran out into

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the crisp night, alive with stars and the chatter of insects. I stood there, looking up at those stars, and tried to force the vision from my mind (I still can't bring myself to write it down). For the first time in my life I felt small and insignificant, as though I had lost control of my destiny or just pierced the illusion of ever having had control. Thank God Tiny is here now, asleep beside his empty bottle, or I'd be too shaken to write at all.

As the shock ebbed, I knew I had to be with someone. It was late, but Madame Sosostris would be up.

As I approached her wagon, I heard the music of Pink Floyd and smelled marijuana. Madame Sosostris was nowhere in sight though, so I sat on her wagon steps to wait.

After a moment, her head poked from the doorway above me. "Judith, you gave me a fright! Thought you were a hick cop or something. Be right down."

In her early fifties, Madame Sosostris is one of the youngest Wonder Circus regulars. She's a mystery, having shown up looking for work in the fortune-telling line just a week after Mother's death. Aside from Tiny she's my only friend; the only one who accepts me without censure or embarrassment.

Chuckling to herself, Madame Sosostris picked her way carefully down the stairs. "A beautiful night. I thought the clouds would stick around, but you never know, you just never know, do you? Ah, give me a moment," she said, bustling away from the wagon, "and I'll be all set up. Then you'll see something." I followed to a spot some yards away.

There was a lounge chair. Beside it, on a tripod, her telescope was mounted. A small table stood within easy reach; on it lay a notebook, an ashtray containing two joints, and the cassette recorder playing Pink Floyd.

Madame Sosostris settled into the lounge chair, then leaned forward to adjust the telescope, fussing with an assortment of eyepieces. "I don't need cards or stars to divine where you've come from; just like your mother, people tell me. I never much cared for the Walk, though. Maybe it's too much competition in the bizarre." She laughed and looked up from the telescope, beckoning me closer.

"Now I can only give you a quick peek tonight, Judith, because I have some very important observations to make in about a half hour. Do you know, I think I've discovered another comet!"

I enjoy stargazing with Madame Sosostris. A respected amateur astronomer (she really has discovered a comet—Westland's Comet—I looked it up), Madame Sosostris seems to take no notice

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of my condition and explains things to me as though she really believes I could understand.

I stood on tiptoes to squint into the eyepiece as Madame Sosostris lit up a joint. Another reason I enjoy stargazing is that it reminds me of the Star Stone. I feel that same pull when I put my eye to the lens that I feel when I touch the Stone. It's as though I'm tugged out of myself, tumbled down a narrow tube of mirrors and bounced into the midst of the stars. In fact, the first time I looked into a telescope I was scared to death; because it was so similar to the Stone, I was certain I'd be trapped out there forever. Now that I know I can come back, it relaxes me and makes it easier to resist the Stone's pull.

But after tonight's vision, instead of reinforcing my sense of will, it made me feel more helpless than ever. As I looked, Madame Sosostris began to lecture, a habit she falls into when high.

"See that group of stars? Don't look much like dogs, do they? But that's what people call them; the Hunting Dogs. If you look real hard, maybe you can see a blur of light, like someone squashed a firefly on the eyepiece. See it? That's another galaxy, like the Milky Way where we live. It's called M-51. I wonder why some galaxies have names like Milky Way and Andromeda, and others are stuck with labels like M-51. Doesn't seem fair, does it? Of course, if there're people living out there, I don't suppose they call their own galaxy M-51." She chuckled, then came the whistle of breath as she drew on the joint.

"You know, Judith, they do kind of look like dogs, though, don't they? I mean, there's one with its mouth open, like it's barking at something. What do you suppose they're hunting? Ah well, we'll never know. All those stars are moving away from us at different speeds. In a thousand years, the Hunting Dogs will be gone; some new constellation'll take their place. Kind of sad in a way. M-51 is moving away too. Fourteen million and some odd light-years away already and hightailing it off at about three hundred twenty miles per second. Everything's getting more and more distant and all we can chase them with are telescopes." She sighed. "That's why I like comets, I guess. They're friendly. They travel around like hoboes, but sooner or later they come back. You can depend on comets. Of course, they end up by smacking into the sun."

I drew back from the telescope at this terrible knowledge so casually imparted by Madame Sosostris. Everything was breaking up, flying apart. One day only isolated stars would exist in all of space, nothing between them but their own faint flickerings;

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ultimately, even their own light outstripped, the reasons for their flight forgotten, they will race on and on, drunk on the fumes of an old combustion.

I almost returned to the Stone then and surrendered to its pull, but I decided to say goodbye to Tiny first. And, when I saw him in the wagon, sleeping his exhausted sleep, the bottle of Virginia Gentleman half full beside him and Vladimir Karamazov's smell in the air, I changed my mind. Because, after all, what does it matter if stars abandon each other so long as people stay true?

But trite sentiments are no substitute for sleeping pills. I was awake all night wrestling with the vision despite Tiny's reassuring snores, and by the time he opened his bloodshot eyes this morning, stumbled to his feet and lurched out of the wagon to find breakfast with a slurred admonition to "Get some sleep," I had decided that I'd seen what amounted to a hitherto unmatchable portent even though its meaning was still unclear.

As the morning passed I lay in bed trying to decide if I wanted to search out that meaning. One thing you learn in a lifetime of fortune telling is that fate has a way of playing itself out like a game of solitaire whether you're aware of the process or not, and that generally it's better, all things considered, to at least have an idea of what to expect so that you don't blunder through life laying red nines on red tens or vice versa. On the other hand, I remember very well what happened to Mother the first time I had this vision, and if there is anything remotely similar looming in my future I don't want to know about it. Some cards are best left unread.

Finally I decided to try and forget the entire episode. I got up, shrugged on a dress (backwards, for appearance's sake), and wandered out into the early afternoon to watch the last of the Wonder Circus get slapped together.

Wouldn't you know, the first person I saw was the state welfare rep. It was just blind luck that I managed to spot her first and could duck into an empty tent before she saw me (even so, I sensed her head swivel suddenly; these types have built-in radar for the afflicted). I peeked out after a moment to watch her stalk off on spindly crane's legs, her sharp-nosed face jerking to follow each sound or movement.

If I hadn't been so preoccupied with the vision, I would have remembered that today would bring the customary visit from the local agent and remained in bed feigning sleep for another few hours. Too late for that, I could at least take refuge in the Wonder Walk, closed to the public until seven p.m. But after a half-dozen

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steps, I stopped and considered that I really didn't want to go back just yet, did I? Not if the same vision were to repeat itself, which seemed likely: In the past, obscure visions had worked themselves out by hammering resolutely away at me until suddenly light dawned. Well, I didn't want light to dawn, so no Wonder Walk. Equally strong, however, was my desire to avoid the woman who even now was probably bringing the full brunt of her considerable moral artillery to bear against Mr. Marley in an effort to win his cooperation in persuading Tiny to give me up. Since I couldn't use the Stone to eavesdrop, I decided to spy on them physically; that course of action having the advantage of eliminating all chances of being captured by the woman, since she'd always be in range of sight or hearing.

Or so I thought. Ear pressed to the side of Mr. Marley's wagon, I hadn't heard more than a muffled word or two when someone's hand clamped onto my arm.

I jumped, would have yelled if possible, and struggled briefly before deciding to bluff my way through on the strength of my supposed handicap. I turned, expecting to find I don't know who, certainly not Marley IV.

He relaxed his grip slightly; in his other hand he idly twitched a riding crop which he carried in emulation of Mr. Marley's ringmasterly style. "Dad's looking for you," he announced with a grin. "Some lady wants to meet you." He commenced dragging me to the front of the wagon.

Then I really fought: scratched, bit, twisted, kicked, and spit. You'd think I'd've maybe inherited some of that fabled Tiny strength? Not so. But I annoyed him enough so that he stopped to twist my wrist behind my back and lever my arm up to my shoulder blades. "She's gonna lock you in a hospital forever," he hissed through hair into my ear. The crop stung the backs of my knees.

Marley IV shoved me ahead of him, jerking me roughly up when I staggered. Then we stopped again, suddenly, and through his hand encircling my wrist I felt Marley IV shudder.

"Just what do you think you're doing to her, young man?" I recognized the voice; it was Madame Sosostris!

Marley IV dropped my hand. I backed against the wagon. "She just tripped, you know Judith, and I helped her up. Anyway, my father wants to see her."

Madame Sosostris lowered her head as though preparing to charge and Marley IV stepped back, bumping against me. "Don't you lie to me, John Marley," she said. "Your father might own

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this circus, but I can break you over my knee any time I feel like it!"

"My dad'll fire you!" Marley IV whispered; then, bravado notwithstanding, fled.

I rubbed at my sore wrist. Madame Sosostris put a gentle arm around my shoulder. "There, Judith, don't be afraid. He won't hurt you anymore. Come back to my wagon and you can watch me tell fortunes and read horoscopes."

I had to smile at that; my skills in the fortune-telling area are far superior to her own, but I didn't want to hurt her feelings so I came.

Inside, Madame Sosostris's wagon is like a maze; thick, faded tapestries hang from the ceiling, dividing and subdividing the space into a kitchen, bedroom, and parlor. Whenever Madame Sosostris brings me to listen to her spin fortunes, she hides me behind one of the curtains so that I can see and hear everything, while at the same time am invisible to the customer. I don't understand why she treats me almost as though she suspects my interest in her fortune-telling attempts (which I view with the bemused indulgence of a master toward a gifted novice), but I am grateful.

Behind the curtains I am spirited off to a gypsy wagon; much of Madame Sosostris's paraphernalia was used originally by Mother. The tapestries leak years of smoky incense, have absorbed as well, I like to imagine, whispers of fanciful and tragic divinations long come to pass. Sometimes Madame Sosostris's voice, muffled through layers of trembling cloth, sounds like how I remember and/or imagine Mother's, and it's as though she's speaking to me from behind a veil as deep and black as the insides of the Star Stone.

Madame Sosostris puttered about her parlor as I watched from a chair, arranging her tarot deck and astronomical charts and sliding her handy "Skeleton Plots of One Hundred Great Novels" into the open-faced back of her reading table. Rummaging through her cassettes, after much indecision she inserted something by Brian Eno into the tape-deck. As the music crept from speakers hidden behind the tapestries, Madame Sosostris opened another cassette, removed a joint and lit up, to "open the channels of communication," as she put it. Then, after lighting two sticks of cinnamon incense, she shooed me behind a tapestry, opened the door to the wagon, turned her shingle around and sat back in her rocker to wait for business.

Moments later the welfare rep. herself walked in. She stood

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still, hands on her narrow hips and elbows pressed against her sides as her eyes flicked across the space. I placed another tapestry between us.

Madame Sosostris reached one finger out to solemnly tap the top card of the tarot deck. "Yes, I'm the fortune teller, if you're wondering. Have a seat."

The welfare rep's neck turned; her body remained motionless. "I'm here for the girl, Judith Lessing. Young Marley told me he saw her come in here."

"Well, she did, but that was some time ago. What do you want to see her for?"

"I don't see how that could be any of your concern." She began to circle the room stiffly, slowly.

"This is my wagon," Madame Sosostris said.

The welfare rep. grasped the edge of a tapestry in her small fist and tugged it back an inch. "Then you can tell me if there is room back here for a small girl to hide."

Madame Sosostris stood. "So you're from the welfare department. I should think you'd have better things to do than harass Judith and her father."

"I was given this case and I don't intend to fail like so many others have." The welfare rep. released the curtain and moved to the other side of the room, keeping the table between Madame Sosostris and herself. "I've already talked to Mr. Marley; I gather it's useless to speak with the father. I understand the girl's a hopeless case as well, but I'd like to see her anyway to get a better idea of what to put in my report."

"Why don't you mention somewhere in your report how happy Judith is here at the circus? Or how it would break her father's heart if you took her away?"

The welfare rep. paused. "That's an extremely selfish attitude. Just because you've grown attached to the child is no reason to deprive her of the care and comfort that could add precious years to her life. I know you think I'm cold and uncaring, but I only want what's best for the child."

"Sometimes it's wrong to preserve life," Madame Sosostris said.

"I hope no one makes that decision for you one day." She went to the door of the wagon. "Well, I've been searching through this circus for hours and I think I can smell a conspiracy. No matter; I've enough for the report. When I show it to a judge, I'm sure he'll order an examination to determine whether Tiny is a competent parent. I think we both know what the results of those tests will show. Of course, you'll be able to visit Judith. Then I'm

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sure you'll agree that it was all for the best, even though it might seem a bit painful now."

"Get out of my tent," Madame Sosostris said. "It's your attitude that's selfish, but you're too narrow-minded to admit the possibility. Yes, I think you will succeed, if that makes you happy. Perhaps you'll even earn a promotion. Congratulations."

"I'm sorry you feel that way," said the welfare rep. She ducked her head and slipped out the door.

Madame Sosostris sat back in her rocker and quietly began to cry.

I crept out the back way and spent the rest of the afternoon wandering, oblivious to the stares and exclamations that everywhere accompany my presence and used to give me such welcome feelings of purpose and stability.

As the circus frantically geared up for the first show and more and more townies pressed into the field to play the assorted games of chance before the main show began (at one point I thought I recognized my Fullback at the shooting gallery, looked again but saw only faces as alike as apples in a basket), I began to build a decision from the day's disarray.

I wandered to the back of a tent where Marley IV was forking hay for Precious and Lad's Lady. "It's your fault I'm stuck with this shitty job," he declared. "That old witch ratted on me!" Then he came at me, brandishing his pitchfork, laughing as I stumbled away.

To the clown's wagon, where, amid snickers and noxious cigar smoke, I was treated to a show of noxious postcards purchased from the proprietor of the local barbershop, then ushered out by one of the more sober clowns.

To Mr. Marley's wagon, where a group of stout Girl Scout matrons were shrilly protesting the inclusion of Hermaphrodita in the magic show and Jack and Jill in the Wonder Walk.

To Madame Sosostris's wagon again, through the back to avoid the line out front, where, proceeding sequentially, Madame Sosostris had reached number forty-seven in "Skeleton Plots of One Hundred Great Novels"—*Lady Chatterly's Lover*; a plain young woman with mousy hair wadded into a bun and glasses as thick as the bottoms of soft-drink bottles, listened in rapture—and distorted music from the Grateful Dead slid between fumes of strawberry incense.

To the Animal Menagerie, where, upon seeing me enter, the apes began to chatter and scold like old country gossips.

Then not to the Wonder Walk, but instead to the cage in the

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back of the big top where Tiny and Vladimir Karamazov were huddled together in heaps of dirty straw, toasting each other with Stolichnaya Vodka and pissing all over themselves.

It was an hour to show time; suspense was in the air, the best seats were filling up. No one noticed as I slipped into the cage and rousted Tiny. Vladimir Karamazov whined as I led out Tiny, who paused and with infinite generosity left his ursine friend the remainder of the bottle.

Back in our wagon, I had to get Tiny cleaned and sober enough for the act. Tiny compounded matters by passing out as soon as we got inside. I undressed him, bathed him (no easy task, shuttling buckets of water from the showers back to the wagon under the noses of people who, in less hectic circumstances, would have smelled a rat) and had him ready (somewhat less than more) after three hours. For his part, refreshed from his nap yet still swimming in the sweaty vat of his strongman fantasies, Tiny was anxious to wrestle.

I lagged behind as he tramped circuitously to the big top where Mr. Marley was waiting incensed; despite my efforts the act was twenty minutes late and the crowd getting ugly.

Tiny swept his boss aside with a negligent shrug, spying his pal Vlad, fumbling with a few oranges in the ring, apparently unable to decide whether to juggle or eat them. The crowd roared, Vladimir Karamazov dropped the oranges and roared, Tiny roared, and they rushed together, happily reunited, and waltzed through the sawdust like old lovers as the crowd screamed for blood.

At that moment I knew I had to go back to the Wonder Walk and link with the Stone again. The show had another hour or two to run, depending on how much of a match Tiny and Vladimir Karamazov delivered, but for the time being the Wonder Walk would be deserted.

Once again I threaded the maze to the center and the Star Stone. Trembling, but resolved to act, I reached out to touch the Stone and was gone, no more myself but not swallowed up by the Stone either, a new creation tumbling in blackness that gradually became suffused with deep purples and oranges as I opened (or closed, depending on point of view) my eyes.

There it was again, the vision I had seen first in Mother's womb, presaging her death and my crippled life, then for the second time a night ago, this time meaning what? As I watched the transformations repeat, Grail to Jack and Jill to Unicorn to Medusa and back again to Grail, I was struck by the remorseless cyclical

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nature of it all, offering no escape, as though people might choose destinies only from a list of roles—a pack of cards—forever fixed and incontestable.

But I had a way out. From the first, I had felt the Stone's invitation like the pull of a gently receding wave. Now, as my fear grew, the Stone sucked persuasively at my will, urging me to abandon my body for the solace to be found as another bright crystal studding its coal-black form, existing only as others perceived me, no longer even observer but something more tentative still, the observed. In that moment, as in the zodiac wheeling endlessly through my head I replaced my mother with myself, I saw also that the vision of my calamitous birth could be read as escape as well as entrance. And I leaped; I did not hesitate for a second; I did not want to bring my own destroyer to life as Mother had.

But something held me back. Even as I strained to sever the threads binding me to my body I was pulled back and my hand torn from the Stone. In my mind, a door closed.

Someone was pummeling my body into the hard floor, groaning breath fetid with alcohol and vomit into my face as flesh tore between my thighs, and I cried out in my mind for the Stone, but my fingers could not reach it so balled into fists and hammered against the back above me, then there was a spurt, a spasm, and it was suddenly clear what was happening to me as the body rolled off and lay face up and it was my Fullback, breathing heavily, hands twitching at his sides.

At first I just lay there, unwilling to move, trying not to feel the blood seep from me. Then my Fullback heaved; vomit frothed at his lips, and he began to cough. I got up and turned him over so at least he wouldn't choke to death, but immediately went to the case holding the last Unicorn's horn to smash it open, take the horn and stab him to death.

I picked up the Stone to smash the glass and went spinning off into the vision again, no longer observing but actually a part of it now, and I realized that it was too late for escape, that it had always been too late. When the vision cleared I left the wagon without looking back. How could I kill my Fullback for playing his part? We all play our parts.

Madame Sosostris was righter than she knew, explaining to me about fleeing stars. We are no different. We flee one another because we must, colliding occasionally in brief and brutal conflagrations then careeening off in new directions toward new spectacles of destruction. Afterwards, nothing remains to evidence

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our passage but the debris of our clashes strung into a single long ellipsis.

The rape only hours past, I write epilogues to things that have not yet transpired. I see the cancerous death of Mr. Marley, and Marley IV expiring in a fashion not unlike my Fullback, strapped behind the wheel of a shimmying universe. I see my own death as predicted, not quick on the heels of my child's birth as it was with Mother, but years later from the hydrocephalus. I see your death as well, Madame Sosostris (for this is all written to you), but I won't reveal it, don't worry; all fortune-tellers should turn that final card themselves.

The law moves more slowly than the Wonder Circus, and by the time the court order for Tiny's examination reaches us my son will be one month old, healthy and as familiar with the Stone as I am now. I will not stay to watch Tiny render the court order useless by stumbling during a wrestling match with V. Karamazov and breaking his own neck—which everyone takes for murder, carrying out swift sentence against Vladimir Karamazov on the morrow—so I cry for my father and his friend tonight.

I see myself delivering these pages secretly to you just before leaving the Wonder Circus to escape the vultures Tiny's death will bring, taking only my son and the Stone. They will look, but they will never find us.

I no longer have the consolation of ignorance to make life bearable, but some consolation seems necessary. As I leave the circus, and later too, when it is visible only as a memory dimmed and scratched by the hard years to come, I think I will pause long enough to look back, just as Vladimir Karamazov is pictured ambling from the oasis on the side of Mr. Marley's wagon. ●

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ON BOOKS

by Baird Searles

The Anubis Gates
By Tim Powers
Ace, $2.95 (paper)

Last month we began this space with notice of an extraordinarily full and speedy book, David Brin's *Startide Rising*. This month there's another with the same qualities—dizzying pace and nonstop invention; otherwise similar to the Brin only in sheer reading pleasure. This one is Earthbound; in fact most of its action takes place in the past, and it's one of those alchemy-as-science themes. The purists can argue on the sidelines as to whether it's SF on the border of fantasy, or fantasy on the border of SF. I'll not take the space for that tiresome subject; I need what little I have to convey coherently what is the absolutely mad farrago of unlikely elements in Tim Powers' *The Anubis Gates*.

Powers is into history, as was aptly demonstrated by his last novel, *The Drawing of the Dark*, which took place in and around the siege of Vienna by the Turks. In both that novel and the new one, he uses historical characters, events, and places with absolute *verismo* and then weaves them into totally wacko situations, somehow keeping the conviction factor afloat.

The Anubis Gates is, on the surface, simple. A mild-mannered contemporary academic, Brendan Doyle, is an authority on the early 19th-century poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (*Xanadu* and all that); he is hired to be the accompanying expert on an expedition back in time to hear Coleridge lecture at a London tavern in 1810. He is marooned there (then?) and all hell breaks loose. Several groups of people are evidently trying to kill him. He becomes involved in the squalid pre-Dickensian London underworld of beggars, thieves, and sorcerers. Then add the following: a sort of werewolf that exchanges its body for that of its victims; an artificially created Lord Byron doppelgänger; a 17th-century archival note in pig Latin; the slaughter of 479 Mameluke beys; a depilatory parlor; the winter of 1684 when the Thames froze over and carnivals were held on the ice (a brief temporal side trip); a bottle of pickled

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pigs' feet; someone using the name Humphrey Bogart in 1810; the squalid Cairo underworld of beggars, thieves, and sorcerors; a heroine with a mustache (fake); a poem that in no way could have an author; and a sort of magical police force called the Sons of Anteus.

This is only a tithe of the people and things thrown at the reader, and there's no way in the world to clarify it any further. The story proceeds in a 400-page rush with several lines going at once, and things aren't made any easier by (as in all the best time travel stories) the same person turning out to be different characters at different points, not to mention that werewolf running around trading bodies. At least once, I totally lost track of who was chasing whom and why, but it didn't really matter; I was having too much fun.

I wonder about these incredibly complex works that are suddenly showing up, such as the Powers and the aforementioned Brin. I have no idea whether those gentlemen use a word processor or not, but both novels, with their elaborately entwined mosaics of short scenes, might well be the product of such a tool. Their complexity seems, at best, prodigious work for the writer without one, no matter how many notes and diagrams are made; the retyping alone whenever a new element is introduced is a staggering task. But the shuffling and redealing is easy (comparatively) on a screen; could the computer/word processor be changing—or expanding—the very form of the fiction we read? An exciting thought.

The Mansions of Space
By John Morressy
Ace, $2.75 (paper)

Considering that religion has been, throughout history, a major focus of human endeavor (as well as a major factor in man's slaughter of his fellows), it has been relatively neglected in SF as a future phenomenon. Most authors play it safe and assume it will be nonexistent or a private affair henceforward; watching the Age of Reason crumble before our modern eyes makes one wonder about this approach.

With *The Mansions of Space*, John Morressy has not only based an SF novel on religion, but used it for a sort of space opera; a curious combination, but the results are not quite so daft as one might expect.

In a future of a vast galaxy of many worlds inhabited by many races, including a huge number of human colonies, the planet of Peter's Rock is rediscovered by a free trader. It has not been visited since it was first colonized by the remnants of the united Christian Church.

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Due to a simple life style and a monastic regimen, the colony has thrived over its many years. The major event in its history has been the flight of a group of schismatics, taking with them the Holy Shroud of Christ in its reliquary, a priceless container made of the total wealth in gold and jewels of the Church. Remaining, however, is the library of antique books, which are now the most precious objects in the galaxy; Peter's Rock has more than the known total elsewhere.

Enskeline, the free trader, who is basically a good sort, agrees for a fortune in books to take six "priest-voyagers" along with him to spread the Christian message, and thereby starts in motion a chain of fascinating, if at times unlikely, events which make up the story. Enskeline decides to go in search of the Shroud and the reliquary; word of the books on Peter's Rock and the reliquary-at-large spreads through the trading and piracy grapevines; a semi-Fascist multiplanetary (as in multinational) organization, the Sternverein, becomes interested, as do various groups of brigands and looters. And we follow Enskeline to various worlds, dropping off missionaries to sundry alien races and searching for clues in the treasure hunt as he goes.

And all of this is complicated by being spread over huge amounts of time due to the time dilation effect of space travel (subjective times of weeks for travelers are years for a planetary population).

It's a peculiar novel, taking off in unexpected directions and by doing so, ending up not tying up the loose ends completely satisfactorily. It has two "heroes" (one is more an anti- who takes over the story around two-thirds of the way through). But the thrust of the narrative and the various worlds are consistently entertaining. Morressy comes out squarely on the side of the angels without being preachy about it (the story does come first and there's almost no theological theorizing)—a rarity since C.S. Lewis's Perelandra trilogy.

When Voiha Wakes
By Joy Chant
Bantam, $2.95 (paper)
The High Kings
By Joy Chant
Bantam, $24.95

Joy Chant is a lady who works very slowly. Her first novel (*Red Moon and Black Mountain*) appeared in 1970, her second (*The Grey Mane of Morning*) in 1977. Now we have a third, *When Voiha Wakes*. *Red Moon* was mentioned here a couple of months ago on its reprinting as an unalloyed delight. The new novel takes place in the same place, Vanderei, on a world with two moons, but many years

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earlier, in a land and culture unencountered before in Chant's stories.

The Halilaki are a pastoral people living in semi-independent communities devoted mostly to farming and herding. The culture is matriarchal and, perhaps like me, you may wince a bit at yet another matriarchy. This one, though, is a convincing and well-thought-out example; it's a working and workaday society in which the women are the organizers and administrators, the men the craftsmen ("Men can't have children . . . they have to make themselves something else to live for."). Therefore, it's not an easy or simple role-reversal situation Chant gives us, though women are dominant sexually, and do the courting, boy-watching, and seducing. Marriage is unknown.

Basically, *When Voiha Wakes* is a love story, a switch on one we know well with the more ordinary gender roles. *The Red Shoes* is a good example—the young woman who must choose between her love and her art. Here it's the young male potter's apprentice, Mairilek, celebrated and much desired in the town of Naramethe for his great beauty. His talent is not for pots, but for music, a major tragedy since there is no musical tradition in this area of Halilak, and even elsewhere in the country, musicians are declassé.

His story is told from the viewpoint of Rahike, the "Young Mistress" of the community who will inherit its administratorship. She begins a relationship with Mairilek thinking, as it were, that he's just another pretty face. It soon develops into a feeling deeper than usual among the Halilaki and she, though unresponsive to his art, encourages it from love and concern. Eventually, of course, he must choose between it and Rahike.

When Voiha Wakes, like *Grey Mane*, is in a much lower key than Chant's first book, which is glamorously extravagant. While I miss the fantastical pyrotechnics, this newest chapter in the story of Vanderei is beautifully executed, a rare *none*pic fantasy which deals with emotional levels not usually encountered in the field.

The author has another book following hard on the heels of the new novel, but it's a very different endeavor; not another story of Vanderei (for which I presume we'll have to wait another six or so years), but a retelling of the Celtic myths of Britain. It's not often we get to be seasonal in this space, but *The High Kings* is certainly a princely gift for any lover of fantasy this Christmas.

There have certainly been retellings of Celtic myths before,

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but these have been done with care, and are presented in a particularly diverting way. It is Chant's case that the Arthurian period and its events are the climax and end of the thousand-year history of Celtic Britain. The Roman "occupation" and the acceptance of Christianity were additions rather than replacements and the Celtic heritage and literature (mostly verbal) continued more or less unscathed until the Saxon invasions. In fact, the Celts adopted Roman legends and made them a part of their lore.

So Chant presents each tale as it might have been told by a bard at some point in Arthur's career, given in a brief frame. The first, for instance, is recounted by Riderch, the chief of Arthur's bards, at the feast held by Gerontius in Cornwall where Arthur initially sees Gueneva (Guinevere). It tells of Brutus, the great-grandson of Aeneas of Troy, and how he discovered the island of Britain and won it from the giants who inhabited it.

Others have to do with "The Two Queens of Locrin," "Bladud, the Blemished Prince," "Leir and His Daughters," and "Great Bran" (my dog, whose name is Bran, has been insufferable about that last title). And there are several more, even less familiar; some have been reconstructed by the author from fragments, their content frankly conjectural.

Most of the stories are also accompanied by a succinct and readable essay on a major cultural point raised in the story (superstitions, the Druids, the status of women), and all have nicely crisp and clear maps designating the locales.

What makes this book extra special, though, are its beautiful illustrations (drawings and paintings) and handsome layout. The art is by George Sharp, the book's design by David Larkin; both have done brilliant jobs. The paintings are spectacular, many double-page spreads and two and three or more to a story. Conveying the quality of visual art on the printed page is close to impossible, but if I say that Sharp's painterly, textured works have echoes of Turner, Klimt, and Maxfield Parrish, that should be contradictory enough to make you want to see them.

All in all, this is a book to lust after.

City at World's End
Edmond Hamilton
Del Rey, $2.75 (paper)

Edmond ("World-Saver") Hamilton was a longtime mainstay of the pulps; the keeper of the flame of space opera when John Campbell & Co. were going off in other directions. But he, too, extended, and wrote some not-quite-space operas for what

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was arguably the best magazine of the late 1940s, *Startling Stories*. (Cries of outrage are now heard from the *Astounding* cultists, but by then the Campbell magazine was already showing signs of the rigidity which was to be a problem for his remaining years; *Startling* and its even more gaudily titled sister magazine, *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, were much more wide-ranging in material.)

City at World's End is one of these (first published in 1950), and while not exactly a deathless classic of SF, it could well be a healthy perennial; a wee bit dated, it's still better reading than most of what was published as mainstream 30 years ago, I betcha. The gimmick is this: a whole Midwestern town (name of Middletown, no less), because it is the locale of a *sub rosa* atomic research facility, is hit by a super-atomic bomb and is blown, not to smithereens (question of the month: what *are* smithereens?), but to the very distant future.

The Earth is barren and devoid of intelligent life, and bloody cold as well, but scouts from the town find an abandoned domed city which the temporal castaways settle into. They've just barely had a chance to make themselves at home when a starship lands, and these poor mid-20th-century Middle Americans find themselves up to their necks in the politics of the Federation of Stars.

Perhaps an indication that the story is a good one is that the reader begins to resent the pell-mell pacing of the pulp novel (even though this was expanded from its initial magazine form); *City at World's End* if written today could use twice the wordage on the same ideas.

Moderns may find unlikely the social stability that keeps a community cooperative under such disruptive circumstances as being thrown a million years into the future; this was in the realm of possibility back then. Rather advanced for its time, however, is the story's handling of the female interest. The putative "heroine" is a Middletown lady who snivels and wrings her hands a lot; just as one is getting up to here with her, Hamilton pulls a switcheroo and introduces a very capable off-planet female who intimidates the hero to the point of knowing that this is the woman for him. Science fiction, even in those days, was doing its bit for equality.

The Halfling
By Leigh Brackett
Ace, $2.75 (paper)

Edmond Hamilton was married to Leigh Brackett, one of several astonishing pairings of writers in the Golden Age of SF. Therefore, 'tis only fitting to note the republication of a group

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of Brackett's glittering short fiction, collected under the title of *The Halfling and Other Stories*. Brackett, fitting her consortship with Hamilton, has been called "the Queen of Space Opera," but her vivid, action-packed stories of the 1940s and '50s brought a sensuousness and poetic feeling to space opera which the male writers had never achieved. She also had a successful screen writing career; it extended from the great Bogart-Bacall *The Big Sleep* to the first draft of *The Empire Strikes Back,* which she completed just before she died in 1978.

Among those included in *The Halfling,* are "The Dancing Girl of Ganymede," "The Lake of the Gone Forever," "The Citadel of Lost Ages," and "Enchantress of Venus." Don't be fooled by those wonderful, campy pulp titles; there's sophisticated writing and ideas here, even though many take place in a lost Solar System where an inhabited Mars or Venus was still possible.

Addenda to last month's column: One of the major reasons that I wanted to mention the reprint of Michael Moorcock's "Elric" series totally vanished as I was writing the piece, and that was to go on about the smashingly beautiful covers that the new publisher (Berkley) has put on them. Paperback covers are going through another period of downright ugliness; there are more than a few good artists around, but even they seem constrained by what publishers' art directors think will sell a book. The results are a "new SF releases" section in any bookstore in which almost all the covers look alike and are uniformly dreary. (My theory is that people in publishing never go into bookstores and therefore have no idea what's happening.) So the appearance of these handsome Elric reprints is cause for rejoicing. The artist is Robert Gould.

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, % The Science Fiction Shop, 58 8th Ave., New York, New York 10014. ●

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Viereck, Peter "In Memoriam Philip K. Dick 1928–1982" (p) ..... Nov 101

Wall, Skip "Pilgrimage" ..... Jan 62
Ward, Frank "In the Eye of the Beholder" ..... Jul 88
Watson, Ian "Showdown on Showdown" ..... Sep 93
—— "Cruising" ..... Mid-D 121
Weiner, Andrew "Invaders" ... Oct 60
Wilkerson, Cherie "$CALL LINK4(CATHY)" ..... Apr 98
Willis, Connie "The Sidon in the Mirror" ..... Apr 134
Wylde, Thomas "The Nanny" . Jul 138

Young, Robert F. "Glimpses" Feb 42

Zebrowski, George (with Pamela Sargent) "The Falling" ... Mar 104
Zebrowski, George "The Sea of Evening" ..... Jul 118

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SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to **ISAAC ASIMOV'S MAGAZINE**
Classified Advertising Department/Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

20 WORD MINIMUM
Only $44.00 for 20 Words or Less
$2.20 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

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YOUR SIGNATURE _____

_____ Words at $2.20 each $ .....

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Total amount for 1 ad $

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $ .....
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(c) Total amount for 3 ads $

(Example. One 20 word ad $44.00 x 3 months = $132.00 x .85 = $112.20)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

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HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word: Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017: 7 WORDS: Zip codes are not counted. Phone #: 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each.: Garden City, New York: 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A, 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to ISAAC ASIMOV'S MAGAZINE.**

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ISAAC ASIMOV — published 13 times a year. CLASSIFIED AD rate is $2.20 per word — payable in advance — ($44.00 minimum). Capitalized words 44¢ per word additional.

ADDITIONAL INCOME

HOW I Made $900,000.00 the lazy way. Complete book $12.00 information. O.L. Walker, 1010 Montreat Road, Black Mountain, North Carolina 28711.

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TESLA COILS. Finished, working, Tesla Coils or Kits or Plans. Large selection. Make your own LIGHTNING or Particle Beam Weapons, Incredible Electrical Displays. For Catalog with PICTURES send SASE and $4.00 to: SPACE LABS SCIENTIFIC, Box 709, Hartshorne, OKLAHOMA 74547

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

SF—Fantasy Magazines, Books (New and Used). 64 page catalog $1.00. Collections purchased. R. Madle, 4406 Bestor Drive, Rockville, MD 20853.

60,000 Science Fiction and Mystery Paperbacks, Hardcovers, Magazines. Free Catalogs! Grant Thiessen, Box Z-86A, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

ANALOG, Asimov, Astounding, Galaxy, Weird Tales, etc. Free catalog of Back Issues. Overseas requests welcome. Ray Bowman, Box 5845A, Toledo, Ohio 43613.

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK! Join our successful authors. Publicity, advertising, beautiful books. All subjects invited. Send for fact-filled booklet and free manuscript report. Carlton Press, Dept. SMA, 84 Fifth Avenue, N.Y. 10011.

DISCOVER A REMARKABLE NEW YOU! Wealth, health, success, happiness WILL be yours! Write P. F. T. Associates, Inc., Dept. 12, P.O. Box 216, Montrose, New York 10548.

NEW WORLDS FROM THE LOWLANDS: Fantasy and Science Fiction of Dutch and Flemish Writers—edited by Manuel van Loggem. "Excellent volume"—Preface by Isaac Asimov. $13.00 paper; $21.00 cloth (total).

DUTCH/AMERICAN BICENTENNIAL READING: New Worlds & Foundation's Edge —with van Loggem & Asimov; introduced by Gregory Rabassa. Video Cassette: $75.00. Order: Cross-Cultural Communications, 239 Wynsum Ave., Merrick, NY 11566.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

THE SWISS, GERMANS, EUROPEANS HAVE MILLIONS $$$ to Purchase and Invest! Free Details! Investor Report-DC, 935 Main, Vidor, TX 77662.

COMPUTERS & SOFTWARE

APPLE Computer text adventures. Only $9.95. Send $2.00 (refunded) for list. Ytrium, 242 W. Jeffrey Ave., Wheeling, IL 60090.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

UNIVERSITY DEGREES BY MAIL! Bachelors. Masters, Ph.D.'s...without attending classes! Inexpensive, fast. Free revealing details. Counseling, Box 389-IA-1, Tustin, CA 92680.

FOR SALE—MISCELLANEOUS

SPACE, SF, and FANTASY posters and Prints. Largest selection. Low Prices. Picture Catalog $1.00: Space Station Studios, Dept. 2A, 14 Palfrey St., Watertown, Mass. 02172.

GIFTS THAT PLEASE

GIVE A GIFT that will be appreciated—ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE, published monthly. Send $17.50 for 13 issues to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 1930, Marion, OH 43305.

HOLOGRAMS. If a picture is worth a thousand words, a hologram is worth a million. Unique 3-D laser images. Send $1 for catalog, $3 for catalog+sample. TJ's Holographics, P.O. Box 893, Brazoria, TX 77422.

HELP WANTED

SINCERE BOOK SALES AGENTS WANTED NOW part-time or full. Millions of potential buyers. Make big money fast. For FREE details write: J.M. LANIER CO., Rt. 2, Box 167d, Opp, AL 36467.

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GREAT RADIO PROGRAMS—mystery, adventure, science-fiction. Free list cassettes. Rare Radio, Box 117, Sunland, CA 91040.

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To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

MISCELLANEOUS

OLDTIME radio programs. Suspense, drama, science fiction, comedies. Highly enjoyable tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Route One, New Freedom, Pennsylvania 17349.

MODEL & MODEL SUPPLIES

ROBOTS! SPACESHIPS! From T.V. and movies. Imported model kits. Unavailable elsewhere. Catalog $1: Cosmic Connection, 426 Moody St., Waltham, MA 02154.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

REDUCE home heating costs 55 ways. Big income circular included. Send $2.00 to: Perry, Box 3637, Springfield, Mass. 01101.

MAKE YOUR CLASSIFIED AD PAY. Get "How to Write A Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth $2.00 towards a classified ad. Send $2.25 (includes postage) to R. S. Wayner, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

MAKE MORE MONEY! Sell our products—Attractive items. Easy to sell—Great for fund raising—Write Today! Lacey, 77-07 Jamaica Ave., Queens, NY 11421.

$350 WEEKLY IN SPARE TIME. Unique, genuine offer (not chain letter or envelope stuffing "gimmick"). Send $2.00 for details (nothing else needs to be ordered from us) to: CEB-1, P.O. Box 17121, Winston-Salem, NC 27116.

OF INTEREST TO ALL

PSYCHOANALYSIS UNAFFORDABLE? Professional researcher and staff specialize in the interpretation of dreams. Include information about age, sex, family background, and current life situation. Detailed personal analysis $5.00 per dream and SASE. Dream Research Associates, Dept. K, Box 914, Tuckerton, NJ 08087.

AUTOTRAVELERS! Relieve boredom! Many fun-filled car-trip games PLUS license plate decoders, 50 states. (Pick any 10 states!) $5.00: Driver's Infoservice, 137-36 80th Street, Howard Beach, New York 11414.

PERSONAL

UNIVERSITY DEGREES BY MAIL! Bachelors, Masters, Ph.D.s . . . without attending classes! Inexpensive, fast. Free revealing details. Counseling, Box 389-DP1, Tustin, CA 92680.

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Hundreds of sincere members! All Ages! Free information! Write: Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

YOU CAN GAIN deeper understanding of yourself/lover/husband/boss through handwriting analysis. Receive valuable insight. Send writing sample and $5.00 to DELPHI, 4576 Airlie Way, Annandale, VA 22003.

BEAUTIFUL Ladies...Asia/worldwide seek marriage/friendship. Beautiful Photos! Stamp appreciated. Golden Heart, Box 2423-K, Yakima, WA 98907-2423.

CONSUMER PROBLEMS? We can help. Send for free, valuable report. Cachalok, 4959 Hollywood Blvd., #409A, Hollywood, CA 90027

ORIENTAL Ladies. Faithful, traditional, affectionate. Thousands seeking marriage, now! Cherry Blossoms, Box 1021DA, Honokaa, Hawaii 96727.

PHOTOGRAPHY—PHOTO FINISHING

SAVE HUNDREDS OF DOLLARS!!! Make your own S & M Densitometer. Send $5.00 for detailed drawings and instructions. A must for successful photography in your darkroom. Order direct: S & M Instruments, Dept. IA1, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

RADIO MYSTERIES

CBS Mystery Theatres—424 Hours on Cassettes, Reels or 8-Tracks. Superb Quality! Catalog $1.00. P.O. Box 3509-IA, Lakeland, FL 33802.

STAMP COLLECTING

WORLDWIDE stamps—25 for 25¢ with approvals. Pay for what you keep, return remainder. Hixson Enterprises, Dept. C, Box 2089, Satellite Beach, FL 32937.

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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

The holidays are almost over, and con(vention) activity is picking up. Shake off that cabin fever and make plans now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 (long) envelope) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. (703) 273–6111 is the hot line. If a machine answers, leave your area code and number. I'll call back on my nickel. Send a #10 SASE when writing cons. Look for me behind the iridescent Filthy Pierre badge at cons, playing a musical keyboard.

JANUARY, 1984

13–15—**Brave New Con.** For info, write: **c/o WACO, Box 5818, Bethesda MD 20814.** Or phone: **(703) 273–6111** (10 am to 10 pm only, not collect). Con will be held in: Reston VA (near Washington DC) (if city omitted, same as in address). Guests will include: Fred (Gateway) Pohl, artist Kelly Freas. Kicking off George ("1984") Orwell's year in grand style.

13–15—**ChattaCon.** Read House Hotel, Chattonooga TN. Traditionally, the first con of the year.

13–15—**EsoteriCon.** Sheraton Hotel, Hasbrouck Hts. NJ (near New York City). M. Z. (Darkover) Bradley, K. (Deryni) Kurtz, J. (Zeor) Lichtenberg. Emphasizing the occult arts.

20–22—**RustyCon, Box 47132, Seattle WA 98146.** R. Asprin, artist W. Warren Jr., fan J. Kaufman.

27–29—**ConFusion, Box 2144, Ann Arbor MI 48106.** Mike Resnick, Wilson Arthur (Bob) Tucker, Fred Pohl, Jack (Humanoids) Williamson, Joe (Forever War) Haldeman, Don (DAW) Wollheim, F. J. Ackerman, Stanley Schmidt, P. Eisenstein, M. Beck, Dick Smith. A classic Midwestern con.

27–29—**Corflu, 1827 Haight #8, San Francisco CA 94117.** Berkeley CA. Terry Carr is toastmaster; the Guest of Honor will be chosen at the con. OGhu awards (takeoffs on the Hugo) will be presented. This one is for fanzine fans—come and see what old-time fandom was all about.

FEBRUARY, 1984

3–5—**SFeraCon, Ivanicgradska 41A, 41000 Zagreb, Yugoslavia.** Bob (Slow Glass) Shaw. Free to non-Yugoslavs. SFera awards given. At the other end of the country from the Winter Olympics.

3–5—**OmniCon, Box 970308, Miami FL 33197. (305) 253–6842.** Ft. Lauderdale FL. True to its name, tries to be all things to all people. Ends up mostly comics/films; but weather is nice.

17–19—**Boskone, c/o NESFA, Box G, MIT PO, Cambridge MA 02139.** Gene (New Sun) Wolfe, D. Hartwell, artist Vincent DiFate.

24–26—**WisCon, c/o SF3, Box 1624, Madison WI 53701. (608) 251–6226 (days), 233–0326 (eves)** J. A. ("Amazons!") Salmonson & Elizabeth (Sardonyx) Lynn will demonstrate martial arts. Masquerade. Workshops. Accompanied kids under 12 free. Traditionally, feminist emphasis.

MARCH, 1984

2–4—**ConCave, Box 116, Park City KY 42160.** Mike Lalor. 24-hour party room, banquet. Very low-key.

2–4—**BayFilk, Box 424, El Cerrito CA 94530.** San Jose CA. About SF folk singing ("filksinging").

16–18—**LunaCon, Box 779, Brooklyn NY 11230.** Hasbrouck Hts. NJ (near New York City). Terry Carr.

AUGUST, 1984

30–Sept. 3—**LACon 2, Box 8442, Van Nuys CA 91409.** Anaheim CA. WorldCon 84. $40 to join in 1983.

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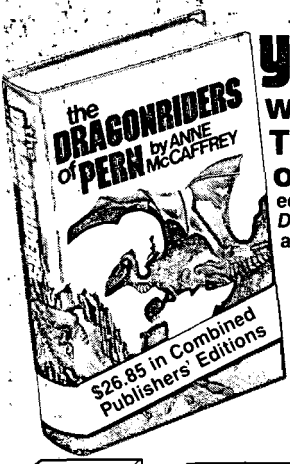

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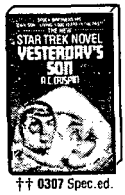

†† 0307 Spec.ed.

0497 Nonfiction. Pub.ed.$14.95

7005 Spec.ed.

† 2295 Spec.ed.

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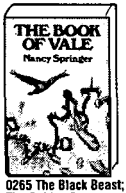
*0216 Pub.ed.$15.95

0190 Farthest Star; Wall Around A Star. Spec.ed.



0265 The Black Beast; The Golden Swan. Spec.ed.

0323 The Dreamstone; The Tree of Swords and Jewels. Spec.ed.

0372 Nonfiction. Pub.ed.$16.95

5637 Split Infinity; Blue Adept; Juxtaposition. Comb.pub.ed.$34.40

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About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), we'll send you the Club's bulletin, *Things to Come*, describing the 2 coming Selections and a variety of Alternate choices. In addition, up to 4 times a year you may receive offers of special Selections, always at low Club prices. If you want the 2 Selections, you need do nothing; they'll be shipped automatically.

If you don't want a Selection, prefer an Alternate, or no book at all, just fill out the convenient form always provided and return it by the date specified.

We allow you at least 10 days for making your decision. If you do not receive the form in time to respond within 10 days and receive an unwanted Selection, you may return it at our expense.

As a member you need take only 4 Selections or Alternates during the coming year. You may resign any time thereafter or continue to enjoy Club benefits for as long as you wish. One of the 2 Selections each month is only $3.98. Other Selections are higher, but always much less than hardcover publishers' editions—up to 65% off! A shipping and handling charge is added to all shipments. Send no money now, but do mail the coupon today!

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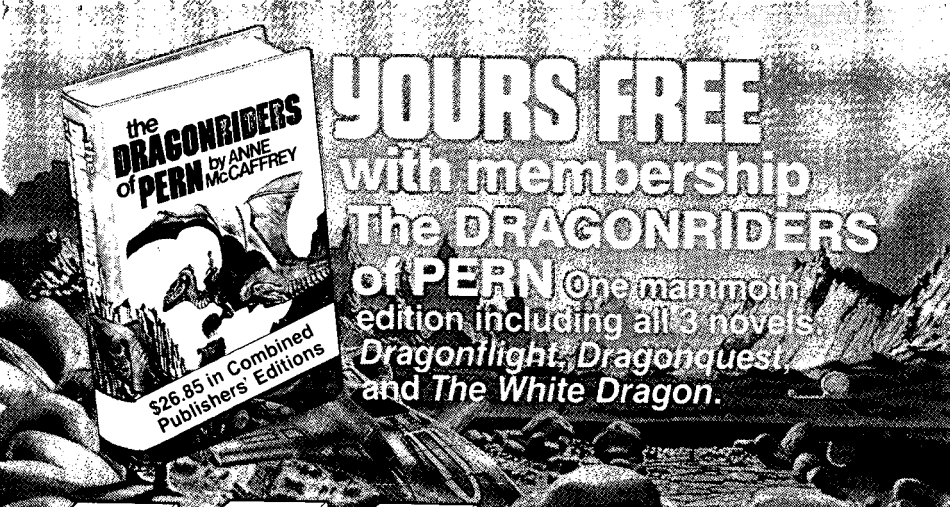

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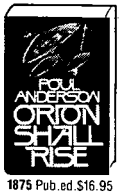

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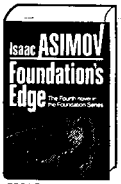

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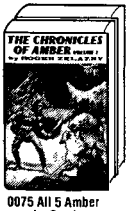
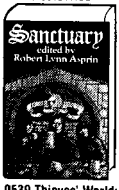
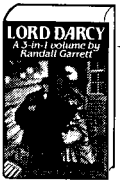


0075 All 5 Amber novels. 2 vols. Comb.pub.ed.$32.30



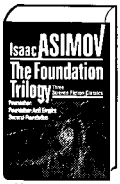
0539 Thieves' World; Tales from the Vulgar Unicorn; Shadows of Sanctuary. Spec.ed.

4853 All 4 Diamond books: Lilith, Cerberus, Charon, and Medusa. Spec.ed.



7799 Murder and Magic; Too Many Magicians; Lord Darcy Investigates. Spec.ed.

1958 Twelve Fair Kingdoms; The Grand Jubilee; And Then There'll Be Fireworks. Comb.pub.ed.$31.85



6221 Foundation; Foundation and Empire; Second Foundation. Pub.ed.$17.95

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